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THE Nation.

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DECEMBER 1, 2008
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Letters

Hoary Myth Laid to Rest

Great Falls, Va.
In the opening sentence of your November 3 lead editorial, you quoted Richard Nixon as saying, "We are all Keynesians now." In fact, it was economist Milton Friedman who said that. His exact words were, "In one sense, we are all Keynesians now; in another, nobody is any longer a Keynesian" (*Time* magazine, February 4, 1966). What Nixon said in 1971 was slightly different. Following an interview with Howard K. Smith of ABC, Nixon said, "I am now a Keynesian in economics" (*New York Times*, January 4, 1971).
Bruce Bartlett

Deadline Poet Got Her Through…

Toledo, Ohio
I thought that XM Radio's uncensored Comedy Channel 150 and Michael Moore's TCFF weekly e-mails would get me through this election season and our economic mess. But I thank *The Nation* and Deadline Poet Calvin Trillin for his weekly jolt of humor and reality! Not sure I could have made it without you.
Sally Binard

Time to Turn Green

Hillsborough, N.C.
For years we have been told to trust industry or government to take care of America. Both have let us down and can't be depended on to fix things [William Greider, "Dr. Paulson's Magic Potion," Nov. 3]. We the people must stand up and save America. Those of us who have jobs need to tighten our belts and buy "green bonds" to invest in our country and community. Revenues from green bonds would turn government building green, build rapid transit and light rail, invest in wind and solar power. This will put our neighbors to work, reduce the cost of government by making the infrastructure more efficient and promote new sustainable industries. By selling green bonds, federal, state and local government will give common citizens an opportunity to be patriotic and to secure our future and that of our country.
Kent Robertson

Obama & the Supremes

DeWitt, Mich.
I agree with Herman Schwartz that it will be better to have Obama making Supreme Court nominations than McPain. However, I have a couple of not-so-minor comments: Stevens, Souter and Ginsburg are, at best, relatively liberal. They're still corporatists. And sure, the Democrats don't want another Bork fight. But you have to admit that they caved in all too quickly on Alito. Think how much better off we'd be today if the Republicans had been forced to exercise the "nuclear option" in the Alito case. The Republicans outfox the Democrats every time in the use of the cloture rule.
Dan Brown

What Took You So Long?

Santa Monica, Calif.
I recently renewed my *Nation* subscription after more than a half-century of lapse, and it's just wonderful to be back. I wanted to say how very happy I am that the magazine has continued unrepentant as ever.

I first subscribed to *The Nation* when I was in high school, in the late 1950s. I remember devouring the special issue on "The Ultras," reading it again and again. I saved all my copies for years. The editorial pages were the best part of the magazine, with Carey McWilliams in full flower—and the magazine was a great place for a young man to improve his English.

My return has prompted a flood of reflection. Now, as then, I read and usually say, "Yes, but nobody is going to do this/believe this." But I notice that just about everything *The Nation* commented on, predicted or expressed concern about half a century ago turned out to be accurate.

(continued on page 24)

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The First 100 Days

The day before the election, Republicans were warning that Barack Obama would bring too much change too soon, that he was a "socialist" who would "spread the wealth around" and that his election would usher in "one-party rule." Then, in the days after his sweeping victory, they tried to claim that his election represented no change at all. According to RNC chair Mike Duncan, Obama's not even really a Democrat. Reckoning with his party's dismal loss, Duncan claimed Obama won because he "ran the most successful moderate Republican presidential campaign since Dwight Eisenhower."

EDITORIAL

Even so, op-ed pages and TV pundits have warned the incoming administration "not to overreach" and have declared America a fundamentally, unalterably "center-right nation."

We beg to differ. On November 4 the electorate clearly and emphatically rejected the conservative economic ideology that has dominated this country for too long. Throughout this election season, it has been progressive ideas—on war and peace, energy independence, trade and healthcare—that have redefined politics. But if the postelection talk is any indicator, the electorate's thirst for change will now face a powerful backlash from an establishment—represented within both parties—wedded to the status quo.

The first big test of whether Obama can resist the pull to cautious centrism will come in the first 100 days of his presidency. He has talked about the need to measure his administration's accomplishments over the first 1,000 days, given the problems he has inherited from George W. Bush, which will take years to undo. But the first 100 days are still crucial in signaling to the American people and the world that the administration will take determined steps to repair this nation.

Obama faces major challenges: a cratering economy, a broken healthcare system, two wars, poverty and growing inequality, and the stained reputation of the United States in the world. The millions who were mobilized and inspired by his campaign and candidacy must continue to drive a bold agenda to respond to these crises.

Here is a list of actions President Obama can take in the first 100 days. Some he can accomplish on day one, with the stroke of a pen; others will demand coalition building and an inside-outside strategy to push legislation through Congress.

Bush executive orders. As Obama said of his first 100 days when campaigning in Denver, "I would call my attorney general in and review every single executive order issued by George Bush and overturn those laws or executive decisions that I feel violate the Constitution."

Economic stimulus. Stop the bleeding—by expanding healthcare and unemployment benefits, providing essential aid to beleaguered state and local governments and investing in long-delayed infrastructure projects.

Iraq. Hold to the sixteen-month timeline for withdrawal.

Healthcare reform. Expand health insurance to kids by passing the State Children's Health Insurance Program legislation vetoed by Bush.

Women's health and reproductive rights. Repeal the "global gag rule," which prohibits NGOs that receive federal funding from promoting or performing abortions in other countries.

Energy and the economy. Announce a clean-energy strategy that will reduce oil dependence, address global warming, create thousands of green jobs and improve national security.

Bailout for Main Street. Work to ensure that homeowners are able to renegotiate mortgages and remain in their homes.

Poverty and inequality. Appoint a hunger czar—as Senator George McGovern and Congressman Jim McGovern called for in a recent op-ed—who would "co-

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

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Mark Ames: The Summers conundrum

Aaron Glantz: Don't forget veterans

Rebecca Solnit: Embracing Obama

NEW BLOG
"State of Change"

VIDEO NATION
A *new* New Deal

PETITION
Pick the right treasury secretary

ordinate the various food, nutrition and anti-poverty programs… to increase the independence, purchasing power and food security of every human being." Announce a commitment to the goal of cutting poverty in half in ten years.

Labor and trade. Reject the Colombia, Korea and Panama trade agreements as currently written and ensure that future agreements promote the public interest. Work toward passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which will enable workers to organize unions without fear of employer intimidation.

Science. Allow federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research.

Global warming. Reverse Bush's EPA decision and allow California to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks. Call for a new climate treaty and ask Al Gore to lead that effort.

Guantánamo. Close the prison, and try detainees in the United States or resettle them in countries where they face no risk of persecution or torture.

Torture. Officially reject all memos, signing statements and executive orders that justify the use of torture. End the use in court of any evidence obtained through torture. Establish an independent commission of inquiry into all aspects of detention and interrogation practices in the "war on terror."

Executive power. Repudiate the Bush administration's claims for the "unitary executive." Renounce the use of signing statements as a tool for altering or ignoring legislation. Pledge to abide by the War Powers Act and end the abuse of the Authorization for Use of Military Force.

By taking these steps—with "deliberate haste"—President Obama would get a real start on repairing our nation. It just so happens that at this moment in American political history, progressives are the only ones offering real solutions to most of these problems. But as the late, great Paul Wellstone noted, ideology is always less important than results. "Politics is not about left, right and center," he said. "It's about speaking to the concerns and circumstances of people's lives."

If the Democrats improve people's lives, the electorate won't care if it's called socialism or Eisenhower Republicanism. They'll call it a success.

Obama's New Deal

COMMENT

The pundits were quick to evaluate Barack Obama's election in light of African-American political traditions going back to the civil rights movement and even Reconstruction, but they have turned increasingly to lessons from the history of the New Deal.

Obama invoked that legacy repeatedly during the campaign, from the account of how his grandfather benefited from the GI Bill to his proposals to create jobs and economic growth through federal investment in education, industrial innovation and infrastructure. Such rhetoric allowed him to claim the legacy of the most popular and successful government programs in American history, but it also displayed some of the limitations of New Deal policies, particularly in their ability to address racial inequality. We can thus turn to the history of those programs for an indica-

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Noted.

THIRD-PARTY GAINS: Third-party and independent candidates found no room to breathe in this presidential year. Locked out of debates and neglected by major media, independent **Ralph Nader**, Libertarian **Bob Barr**, Green **Cynthia McKinney** and their compatriots tallied roughly 1.5 million votes combined—barely half Nader's total on the Green line in 2000. But down-ballot races showed some cracks in the duopoly.

The **Vermont Progressive Party** won its first State Senate seat and five State House seats. New York's **Working Families Party**, capitalizing on laws permitting fusion of major- and minor-party vote totals for co-endorsed candidates, provided the victory margin for Democrat **Eric Massa**'s Congressional win and helped Democrats grab control of the State Senate. In Connecticut, a Hartford WFP candidate was the first third-party contender in history to be elected as a city registrar of voters.

The Greens won an Arkansas State House seat and took advantage of the Republican abandonment of Congressional races to win 200,000 votes (21 percent) for US Senate candidate **Rebekah Kennedy**. New Mexico Green **Rick Lass**, who sought one of five seats on the state's Public Regulation Commission by running on a clean-energy, green-jobs platform, won 44 percent of the vote in a contest with a Democrat. San Francisco Green **Ross Mirkarimi** was re-elected to the board of supervisors, setting the electorally savvy lefty up for a possible mayoral run. Also in San Francisco, independent progressive **Cindy Sheehan** easily beat the Republican to finish second behind House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi**. Vermont independent gubernatorial candidate **Anthony Pollina**, with support from the Progressive Party, major unions and daily newspapers, placed ahead of the Democrat to finish second in the race for the Green Mountain State's top job.

JOHN NICHOLS

WAL-MART TIME: When the Labor Department released its latest jobs report on November 7, the news was even grimmer than expected. The unemployment rate jumped twice as fast as economists were projecting between September and October, reaching 6.5 percent, the highest level in fourteen years. A day earlier, the department announced that more than 3.8 million Americans are receiving unemployment benefits, the most since the recession of the early 1980s. Real weekly earnings fell again in October, on the heels of the first quarterly decline in consumer spending in seventeen years. Major retailers followed the bleak employment figures with reports of double-digit sales declines. Most are anticipating a decidedly unfestive holiday shopping season.

Most, but not all. While the economic crisis has its rivals reeling, **Wal-Mart** posted increased sales in October and is forecasting more of the same in the coming months. As jobs vanish and paychecks shrink, Wal-Mart's rock-bottom prices—the end product of a business model reliant on cheap overseas production, super-low wages and aggressive unionbusting—are becoming the only recourse in what's shaping up to be a recessionary Christmas. At a recent investors meeting, Wal-Mart CEO **H. Lee Scott Jr.** sounded positively Grinch-like when he linked the country's economic desperation and the company's good fortune. "In my mind, there is no doubt that this is Wal-Mart time," Scott said. "This is the kind of environment that Sam Walton built this company for."

MAX FRASER

MINNESOTA, THE NEW FLORIDA: Lawyers asking judges to block the counting of absentee ballots. Unfounded charges about the supposed partisanship of local election officials. An attempt to claim a victory before all the votes are counted in order to create a false sense of inevitability. Sound familiar? No, this isn't Florida 2000. It's Minnesota 2008, but the too-close-to-call finish of the Senate race between Republican incumbent **Norm Coleman** and Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party challenger **Al Franken** is shaping up as another high-stakes recount fight. Indeed, Coleman's crew could make Karl Rove blush.

With an initial advantage of about 700 votes out of almost 3 million cast, and with absentee and disputed ballots still to be reviewed, the Republican demanded that Franken concede in order to save taxpayers the cost of a recount. When that didn't work, Coleman sent lawyers into court on a Saturday—without notifying Franken's camp—to try to prevent the counting of absentee ballots from heavily Democratic Hennepin County (Minneapolis). At the same time, Coleman's campaign manager claimed that the result of commonplace corrections of vote totals by county election officials, which narrowed the Republican's margin to barely 200 votes, were "highly suspicious" and "statistically impossible." Minnesota Secretary of State **Mark Ritchie**, one of the nation's leading electoral-integrity advocates, scolded Coleman's camp for "denigrating the election process" and trying "to create a cloud" over a recount that is likely to last into mid-December.

Ritchie, a DFLer who has maintained a rigorously nonpartisan office and is determined to get a clean count, will have his hands full dealing with the win-at-any-cost Coleman team.

JOHN NICHOLS

DEAN'S NEXT MOVE: When **Howard Dean** became chair of the Democratic National Committee, **Karl Rove** was yapping about how America was permanently realigning as a Republican-red nation. Four years later, Democrats control the presidency, Congress and most statehouses. Dr. Dean's cure for what ailed his party—a fifty-state strategy that Washington insiders **James Carville** and **Rahm Emanuel** once griped about—built the foundation for **Barack Obama**'s breakthrough victories in states like North Carolina, Indiana and Colorado. Dean transformed the Democratic Party more thoroughly than any DNC chair since **Paul Butler**, who in the 1950s steered the party away from the solid South and toward then-Republican states in New England and the upper Midwest. So why's Dean stepping down? He knows DNC chairs don't make strategy under Democratic presidents; they take orders from the White House. But Dean leaves—hopefully for the corner office at the Department of Health and Human Services—as something few expected: the man who proved Rove wrong.

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tion of how the Obama administration will confront the interrelated problems of economic and racial inequality in the twenty-first-century United States.

Despite conservatives' alarm about "the slippery slope to socialism," Franklin Roosevelt displayed a strong aversion to direct control over the economy. Instead, his administration relied on civil society groups to implement and enforce government policies. Rather than impose wage and price regulations to stabilize the economy, for example, the National Recovery Administration allowed business associations to establish standards and then empowered unions to enforce them. That unprecedented mobilization of civil society sowed the seeds for the industrial union movement, which proved critical to Roosevelt's re-election in 1936 and deepened his commitment to social democratic reform in the late 1930s and early '40s.

It was this synergy between federal policy and popular mobilization that created the "greatest generation" that, as Obama stated in June, "conquered fear itself, and liberated a continent from tyranny, and made this country home to untold opportunity and prosperity." Increased protection under the National Labor Relations Act allowed unions to raise wages and benefits steadily in the 1940s and '50s, while the GI Bill and other programs helped workers invest those gains in new homes, college education, health insurance and pensions. By 1951 even *Fortune* magazine had to admit that the expansion of organized labor had made the worker "to an amazing degree a middle class member of a middle class society."

But there is a more troubling side to the New Deal's legacy, which will not be resolved through populist appeals to the struggling middle class. A growing body of scholarly literature has shown that the same reliance on civil society that inspired the labor movement also prevented the Roosevelt administration from addressing deeply ingrained racial inequalities. While unions improved wages and conditions for industrial workers, they had little impact on the agricultural and service sectors, where the vast majority of blacks and Latinos labored for low wages without collective bargaining rights, health insurance or even Social Security. The GI Bill offered mortgage assistance and scholarships to all veterans but did nothing to ensure that African-Americans could use those benefits to attend segregated colleges or buy homes in segregated neighborhoods. Indeed, had Obama's paternal grandparents lived in the United States it is unlikely they would have shared the sepia-toned vision of the New Deal era that was so pervasive in his campaign material.

The civil rights movement was in many respects an effort to address those shortcomings. Voting rights and equal protection had been central to African-American political objectives since Reconstruction, but demands for equal access to education, housing and employment addressed the more immediate racial injustice of New Deal policies.

President-elect Obama has an opportunity to further racial and economic justice by fusing the New Deal and civil rights traditions. He expressed that link directly in Philadelphia in March, when he insisted that unless Americans confront racial inequality directly, they will "never be able to come together and solve challenges like healthcare, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American." Such a confrontation would entail strengthening the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other civil rights agencies, while addressing racial inequalities in primary school funding, economic development and incarceration. Just as the GI Bill benefited white veterans more than black ones, race-neutral policies are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities.

Many of Obama's supporters have already made that connection. Union density is roughly the same now as it was before Roosevelt's election in 1932, but organized labor has incorporated the lessons of the civil rights movement perhaps more consciously than any other institution. African-Americans are more likely to belong to unions than any other racial group, and many have risen to positions of power in the nation's largest and fastest-growing unions. Those same unions have built close alliances with organizations dedicated to civil rights, not only for African-Americans but also Latinos, women and gays and lesbians. Obama has promised to sign the Employee Free Choice Act, which would make it easier for unions to organize and thus bolster their ability to support his re-election in 2012.

There are certainly risks to this approach. Journalist Matt Bai noted during the campaign that Obama's appeal depended at least in part on his refusal to "behave like a civil rights leader." Just two days after the election, the *New York Times* reported that Obama had already "begun an effort to tamp down what his aides fear are unusually high expectations among his supporters." His transition team is dominated by veterans of the Clinton administration, which retreated from its attempt at healthcare reform and adopted the conservative mantra that "the era of big government is over."

Some will certainly advise Obama to adopt a similar stance. But that would likely prevent him from implementing the reforms that inspired his supporters in the first place. His victory depended on his ability to mobilize a broad, multiracial majority, an achievement slighted by John McCain and others who restrict its "special significance" to African-Americans. That majority acted out of the belief that Obama was best prepared to address the economic crisis, but many voters, white and black, also saw in him a chance to overcome the racial inequalities that have plagued the United States since its founding. History tells us that Obama may not be able to deliver his promise for economic change without also embracing the civil rights movement's call for race-conscious reform. WILLIAM P. JONES

William P. Jones, author of The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South, *is associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin. He is writing a book titled* The New Color of Class: Race and Inequality in the Service Economy.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

On the Trashing of Sarah Palin

McCain's guys now trash Palin as a dunce
(Implying vetting should have been much stricter).
They may be right, but gracious they are not,
Considering that they're the ones who picked her.

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Obama's Iraq Challenge

COMMENT

In 2006, when the Democrats recaptured the House and Senate, there wasn't any doubt about the antiwar mandate. That election was widely seen as a referendum on the Iraq War, and the new Democratic majority felt empowered by it. In 2008, though, it isn't so clear. According to voter surveys and exit polls, the economy is now first and foremost on voters' minds; and judging by Barack Obama's first steps as president-elect, it's the number-one thing on his mind, too.

There's no question that for the vast majority of voters, Obama was seen as the antiwar candidate. Throughout the campaign, he said repeatedly, "I will end this war," and he outlined an unconditional, sixteen-month timetable to withdraw US combat forces. According to exit polling, nearly two-thirds of those who voted disapproved of the war in Iraq, and those who strongly disapproved voted for Obama by a margin of eight to one.

Still, when the financial crisis exploded in September, Iraq receded as a front-burner issue. According to those same exit polls, only one voter in ten identified Iraq as their top concern. That could make it harder for Obama to claim that he has a mandate to end the war. But claim it he must, because as president-elect and then as president, he is going to face enormous pressure to abandon his pledge to withdraw.

That pressure will come from within his circle of advisers, some of whom saw Obama's antiwar stance as good politics but bad policy. It will come from hawkish Democrats outside his circle and from those elbowing their way in, typified by Richard Holbrooke, who found himself shut out of Obamaland after he endorsed Hillary Clinton in the primaries. It may come from hawks close to Vice President–elect Joseph Biden, who voted for the Iraq War in 2002. It will certainly come from conservatives, neoconservatives and the editorial pages of the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. It will come from think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and the Center for a New American Security, which have close ties to Obama and the Democratic establishment.

Most of all, the pressure on Obama will come from the military, whose leadership won't look kindly on an incoming administration that wants to change course. Indeed, a showdown with the military command could be the most dramatic event of Obama's first weeks in office. It would pit him squarely against Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Gen. David Petraeus, the Centcom commander; and Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of US forces in Iraq, all of whom will argue strenuously against anything more than a limited withdrawal, tied to conditions on the ground.

Early in his administration, Obama may sit down with Petraeus—a politically savvy general who, it is rumored, is thinking about running for office himself, and who is the darling of the neoconservative movement—and tell him he intends to pull one to two combat brigades out of Iraq every month, starting immediately. And he'll have to look around the room—at Mullen, Odierno, the Joint Chiefs and others, one by one. Each one of them will be aware of the pressure Obama will be under from hawks and right-wingers, and behind the scenes they're likely to do what they can to fuel it. The Constitution gives Obama the power to order them to carry out the new policy, whether they like it or not. If they don't, well, he can tell them not to let the door rattle their medals on the way out.

It may not be the equivalent of President Truman's firing of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, but it's possible Obama will have to clean house, putting in place generals prepared to accommodate the new commander in chief. There are many, typified by Gen. George Casey, the former US commander in Iraq, and Gen. John Abizaid, the former Centcom commander, who advocated a pullback in 2005–06 and who might be expected to go along with Obama's policy. And in dealing with his generals, Obama can point out that the Iraqi government supports his timetable and that Baghdad is unwilling to sign a status-of-forces agreement that gives the United States a blank check to stay.

Yet there are worrying signs that Obama is feeling the pressure to climb down from his Iraq policy. During September and October, he made what appeared to be a tactical decision to stop touting his plan to end the occupation. It hardly came up during the Obama-McCain debates, although Obama did slam McCain for his poor judgment in supporting the war in 2003. Still, Obama did not aggressively put forward his withdrawal plan during the debates, and he was oddly defensive whenever McCain challenged him over the surge.

Equally troubling, Obama made it through the entire campaign refusing to say much about his plans for Iraq besides the withdrawal, including what a residual force might look like, i.e., how many troops might remain in Iraq after the withdrawal of combat brigades, and what their mission might be. (During the summer some Obama advisers wanted to draw a starker contrast with McCain over Iraq, and some wanted to muddy the differences. The mud advocates seem to have prevailed.)

Also worrisome is the support in the Obama camp for retaining President Bush's defense secretary, Robert Gates, an idea that has won the backing of many in the Washington establishment. Gates is closely identified with the surge and, in tandem with Petraeus, he would probably counsel Obama to rethink the idea of unconditional withdrawal of combat forces. Also, by naming a Republican to Defense, Obama risks a concession to the canard that Democrats are ill-suited to handle national security, and he would pass up the opportunity to inject bold thinking and budget-cutting—both of which the Pentagon sorely needs.

Make no mistake: Iraq will be a difficult problem for Obama. Bush has handed him a country still perched on the brink of civil war, and it could flare up again at any moment. If violence grows, Obama may pay a political price, but get out he must. Doing so will require boldness, decisive action and skillful regional and international diplomacy. Obama's cautious instincts may lead him to take the advice of those who urge him, instead, to go slow on Iraq. Continued popular mobilization against the war is needed to counter that pressure. Much is made of the 10 million e-mail addresses the Obama campaign put together over the past two years, and how President Obama can use that list to mobilize support for his policies. But e-mail works in both directions, and those 10 million Obama backers ought to start composing e-mails right now to deluge the White House over Iraq. The same goes for the organized peace and justice movement, which can't afford to stand down.

ROBERT DREYFUSS

Robert Dreyfuss is a Nation *contributing editor.*

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Remembering Studs

COMMENT

Studs Terkel's death was met with an extraordinary outpouring of praise and affection—not only full-page articles in this country's and England's leading newspapers but in spontaneous comments called in to his old Chicago FM station, WFMT.

It took the obituaries to remind most people how incredibly popular Studs was in the early days of TV. Having started in the 1930s as a small-time radio actor, a time remembered affectionately and very funnily in his last book, *P.S.*, just published, he went on in 1949 to star in an early TV show, *Studs' Place*, one of the great hits of what was known as the Chicago school of TV. Spontaneous and largely unscripted, it should have led to a lifelong career in this new medium. But Joe McCarthy was on the prowl, and the networks were petrified. Studs—who, as he joked, never met a petition he didn't like—was a clear target. Forsaking the many opportunities offered him to knuckle under, Studs deliberately entered years of bare survival in the wilderness. It was still such a painful memory that when I suggested he try an oral history of those years, Studs refused. Only late in his life, with his memoir *Touch and Go*, was he willing to revisit that difficult time, doing so with humor and no bitterness, praising the few who, like Mahalia Jackson, had stood up for him. But the anger never left him, understandably enough.

Studs overcame the McCarthy period with his remarkable daily WFMT radio show, interviewing authors, actors and famous visitors to his city. He was so hardworking and perceptive that guests, like *New York Times* correspondent Harrison Salisbury, would say that they sounded better talking to him than in anything they'd written.

It was these brilliant interviews, published in the WFMT monthly magazine, that led me to call him. I suggested that he try a new tack, interviewing ordinary Americans in what I hoped would be a sequel to Jan Myrdal's *Report From a Chinese Village*, which I had just published. The resulting book, *Division Street: America* (1964), became an instant bestseller and launched Studs on a new career in which, in effect, he rewrote the history of this country since the 1920s. His books on the Depression (*Hard Times*) and World War II (the Pulitzer Prize–winning *"The Good War"*) changed the way we saw our past. Studs showed how guilty the victims of the 1930s still felt, how innocent America's liberators of Europe had been. And he showed how racially charged the war was, documenting racial fragging and other conflicts that none of the noted historians before him had discovered (or chosen to write about). In *Race* (1992), the first book I published at The New Press, Studs, who had always been engaged in the civil rights movement, discovered how much more racist the country was becoming.

Studs's secret, often sought out, was that he approached people with utter respect. Those he talked to immediately felt this and poured their hearts out. Studs was proudest of an interview with a woman in a Chicago public housing project who, as he left, said, "I never knew I felt that way." He never added a word, but edited with the skills he had learned in years of radio work.

In Studs's most successful book, *Working*, which has sold well over a million copies, he was as surprised as I was that we could find no one to interview who actually liked his job, not even those we sought out as people who looked like they did. We finally found one man, a stonemason, who was happy in his work. But the book has resonated with so many readers precisely because Studs discovered this uncomfortable truth, not imposed it, as his right-wing critics, who deny these problems exist, would have us believe.

Ironically, two days after running a thoughtful and appreciative obituary, the *New York Times* published a particularly nasty attack by Edward Rothstein, who seems to be the paper's art critic in charge of right-wing political correctness. Rothstein depicted Studs as a covert Marxist, twisting his interviews to claim that he invented an alienated populace (similar charges were made some years ago by Rebecca Sinkler, the former editor of the *Times Book Review*). But in addition to his predictable attack on Studs's romantic populism, Rothstein chose to end by quoting one of Studs's many blurbs, this one praising Bill Ayers. This borrowing from the McCain-Palin playbook, just as their tawdry political campaign was drawing to a close, was a reminder that McCarthyism has not disappeared from the American scene. Even after his death, Studs had to suffer the kind of attack that came close to ruining his life in the 1950s, not on some Internet *Drudge Report* but in the pages of the establishment's leading paper (which refused to run my protest letter).

Tellingly, the only time Studs failed was when I suggested he try a book on power. The people he approached were such accomplished liars that none of them would even admit that they held power. It was the one project we had to give up.

The New Press has kept nearly all of Studs's books in print, and the Chicago Historical Society has created a marvelous website, studsterkel.org, where you can hear many of his original tapes. There you can discover not only the oral historian but the incredibly knowledgeable musicologist who could easily compare a Mozart aria to Ravi Shankar's or Bessie Smith's music. You can also see what a brilliant and empathetic reader Studs was, shown in his incomparable interview with James Baldwin, published in *P.S.* Studs was far more than a man of the people, for which he has become understandably famous, more than the engaged political activist, more than a central figure in Chicago's cultural life. To me, he was a close and extraordinarily loyal friend with whom it was a joy to work for more than four decades. But what matters most to us as a nation is that he was also one of the most original intellectuals of his time, whose work will help all of us to understand our country and the past century for many years to come.

It's poignant that only a few days after Studs died, John Leonard succumbed to the lung cancer that had dogged his last years. A brilliant critic and a true friend, whose books The New Press was proud to publish, John is remembered by *Nation* readers as its literary editor—with his wife, Sue—and a frequent contributor over the years. When I last saw John, shortly after Studs's death, he said, "We're losing a lot of good people." He was too right.

ANDRÉ SCHIFFRIN

André Schiffrin, whose recent memoir, A Political Education, *in part describes his years working with Studs Terkel, is founder and editor-at-large of The New Press.*

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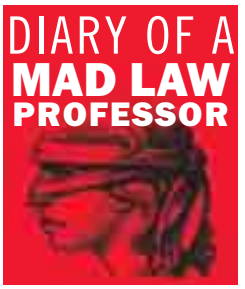
Patricia J. Williams

Uncooperative Housing

This year is the fortieth anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. As we celebrate Barack Obama's election and the extraordinary social transformations that the civil rights movement brought us, we should also review with fresh eyes some of the divisions that remain. One of the thorniest of these is housing segregation. There is no doubt that many suburbs are less monolithically white than they used to be, and that many neighborhoods in the Deep South have integrated at faster rates than in the urban North. Overall, however, national disparities in public schools, medical care and policing all flow from the fact that residential segregation by race remains a pervasive feature of American life—and that it exists in the United States at a higher rate than in just about any other industrialized country. This, in turn, allows for—and even rationalizes—separate and very unequal public policies exacerbating the social barriers between white citizens and those in communities of color.



Geographic isolation enables a vicious circle of human devaluation: public transportation is less reliable and sometimes nonexistent in many neighborhoods marked as black; this makes it harder to be punctual in the workplace. More schools are built next to or on top of industrial waste sites in communities of color, contributing to more public health crises like asthma and lead poisoning. And banking practices are often wildly different: it is much harder to obtain a prime (rather than a subprime) mortgage in a black neighborhood than in a white one with similar income levels.

Take New York City—at once the most cosmopolitan and mixed up of metropolises. When I voted on November 4, I saw an exhilarating civic festival, with lines of good people wrapped around the block. But I spotted only one other black person in the entire crowd. Despite its generally left-leaning politics, Manhattan is one of the most residentially segregated places in the country—not just neighborhood by neighborhood but block by block and building by building. Take co-ops: unlike condominiums, rentals or straight sales (which have only a right of first refusal), co-ops can turn applicants down without ever disclosing a reason and are by their structure immune to fair-housing testers. For years, organizations like the Anti-Discrimination Center in New York have been trying to get the City Council to hold hearings on a bill that would require such disclosure. Although almost two-thirds of cooperative apartment owners support it, the bill languished until just months ago, when the City Council advanced a new version requiring *zero* disclosure and shifting rule-making authority from the City Council alone to a process of "consultation with…the cooperative apartment industry."

It's a tad contradictory: on the one hand, New York City has one of the more comprehensive antidiscrimination laws around, in addition to federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status or disability. There is also a city law covering source of income, occupation, sexual orientation, marital status, alienage, citizenship status or "persons with whom children are, may be or would be residing." On the other hand, the institutionalized obstacles presented by the real estate industry keep us as far apart as ever. One of the reasons "occupation" is included in the above list is to prevent not just the obvious but also the kind of scenario whereby a landlord uses an applicant's job as a cover, as in: *It's not that she's black or a woman. It's that she's a lawyer.*

From 2006 to 2007, the number of mortgages to black borrowers in New York fell by 44 percent and to Hispanics by 34 percent. The numbers remained more or less the same for white and Asian borrowers. One should not assume that this decline was because black and Hispanic borrowers didn't deserve loans. Here's the deeper story: black and Hispanic populations tend to be concentrated in neighborhoods where they are more likely to be served only by subprime lenders—many of which have gone out of business in the past few years. In addition, when housing prices fall, they tend to fall first in minority neighborhoods; hence, more people in those neighborhoods have been hurt by the value of their homes dropping below the amount they owe.

Then there is the matter of straightforward discriminatory lending practices, like redlining, by prime and subprime lenders alike. And as I mentioned in my previous column, one of the least reported aspects of the Bush administration's horror show was a federal lawsuit that blocked New York State from investigating discriminatory mortgage lending. Even in its final days, the administration seems determined to crush the possibility of regulation in any arena whatsoever. The original emergency bailout provisions, for example, gave the treasury secretary broad powers to suspend public laws—including the Fair Housing Act.

In view of the entrenched global crises facing the new president, reversing the fallout from some of this must, like the election, begin with us. We often fight the good fight as though it exists on a battlefield far, far away rather than in our own backyards. And so, dear *Nation* reader, on the dawn of our spanking-new era of optimism, a good starting point might be to ask ourselves, How financially integrated are our neighborhoods? Do we have any black or Latino neighbors? Does our building have wheelchair access? Have we thought about the "steering" tendencies of realtors that might allow one's building to be labeled "singles-friendly"—does that mean no children or no elderly? Does it include veterans? Does "family-friendly" include openly gay families? Is our notion of religious diversity limited to Judeo-Christian? Does one's "international" neighborhood include Muslims or Hindi speakers or Mexican immigrants?

As an old civil rights maxim puts it: "In the South you can come as close as you like, but know your place. In the North, you can rise as high as you like, but just don't come near." It's time we Americans challenged the limits of our assigned "place" in society as well as the biases that keep us from drawing near enough to know how much of a collective vision we truly share. ■

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Eric Alterman

These Are Better Days

Barack Obama's election to the presidency is the greatest electoral moment of my lifetime and unless you were around in 1932—or perhaps 1860—yours too. Listen, people, Obama will disappoint us. That's part of the job description. But somehow, our nutty political system has produced a president who is to politics what Duke Ellington was to an orchestra and a recording studio, what Muhammad Ali was to a boxing ring (and an empty microphone) and what Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band still are to 80,000 people in a football stadium. How wonderful to have our faith in the very idea of hope fully restored in this way, following eight years of full-throated fearmongering in the service of nothing but cronyism, corruption, ignorance and arrogance. How empowering to learn that the Bush/neocon vision of America has been signed, sealed and delivered to the ash heap of history.

What makes it so much more satisfying is that it took place in the face of a decades-long drumbeat—begun by conservatives but echoed in the MSM—that liberals by definition cannot be patriots. We don't care enough about NASCAR. We shop at Zabar's. We prefer Fellini to idiots ranting about "feminazis" on the radio or demanding invasions of this or that Arab country on TV. Well, who's "anti-American" now, Bub?

A mighty train of change is coming to Washington, and it will be interesting to see which members of the insider establishment try to hop on board. Throughout the campaign, for instance, the *Washington Post* remained captive to the outdated, self-glorifying myths of the permanent political class to whom and for whom it speaks. The paper passed along the McCain campaign's lies in its news pages without taking a position on their truth or falsehood, at times equating arguable propositions put forth by the Obama campaign with deliberate efforts by McCain to deceive. Contempt continually dripped from the pen of *Post* White House columnist Dana Milbank as he parroted the McCain campaign's racist-tinged attack on Obama's alleged "presumptuousness"—a 2008 synonym for "uppity negro"—padding his attack with phony quotes and trumped-up charges that should not have passed any honest reporter's smell test. (Following Obama's first postelection press conference, in which he chose not to call on any reporters from the *Washington Post*, Milbank criticized him for being "cagey" about—I kid you not—the kind of puppy he planned to buy for his children.)

Another common characteristic of the *Post*'s coverage was to demand the impossible of Obama and then complain when he failed to deliver. Lead political reporter Dan Balz, for instance, wrote a story in which he credited Obama with "offer[ing] criticisms of the administration's initially sketchy [bailout] plan… in line with changes that Congress made before eventually approving the package." If this sounds prescient on Obama's part, well, you've got it all wrong according to Balz, who faulted the man because "it's not clear that he has had any better ideas—or put them forward more aggressively." Yes, Mr. Balz, it's also not clear that Barack Obama can run faster than a speeding bullet or leap tall buildings in a single bound…

The paper's op-ed pages were similarly infected. Ex-liberal Richard Cohen, sounding like an old *bubbe* from Boca, twice demanded that Obama disassociate himself from Louis Farrakhan, even though Obama has never had anything whatsoever to do with Louis Farrakhan. (Should Cohen disassociate himself from Meyer Lansky and David Berkowitz?) Foreshadowing the future, no doubt, *Post* columnist Ruth Marcus demanded Obama "stand up to the inevitably overreaching demands of congressional Democrats." In other words, forget the election results: the purpose of a Democratic president, according to insider conventional wisdom, is to resist the policies put forth by Democrats.

Alas, eight years of Bush/Cheney rule have destroyed a lot of brain cells in Washington, not just those at the *Post*. ABC's anchors convinced themselves that the most important issues facing a country in crisis were flag pins, preacher politics and cutting capital gains taxes. Mark Halperin of ABC and *Time*, an avatar of the notion that Matt Drudge is America's most influential journalist, continued to cover politics as if Karl Rove were constantly whispering in his ear. (If you're wondering how it was that Halperin was so certain that McCain had chosen Mitt Romney rather than Sarah Palin as his running mate, you needed only to know that Romney's selection was Rove's pet project.) Over at the Associated Press, a single outlier poll taken after the third debate led a reporter to credit McCain's "strong debate performance" with reversing the tide of the race. In fact, the tide remained unchanged, and the only people who thought otherwise worked for Rupert Murdoch. Would it surprise anyone to learn that AP's Washington bureau chief, Ron Fournier, had been offered a job on the McCain campaign?

Another reputation to suffer greatly during this election cycle, sadly, was that of *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. True, the paper's political coverage was by and large first-rate, as was much of the commentary offered on its editorial pages. But the paper could not escape the stench emanating from the presence of longtime Republican operative William Kristol, whose backstage politicking on behalf of the hapless Palin, frequent factual errors and ridiculous pretense that Obama was "disdainful…of bourgeois America" but "usually good at disguising this" proved a consistent source of embarrassment to pretty much everyone associated with the newspaper. You may recall that when readers objected to the hiring last December, editorial-page editor Andrew Rosenthal mocked their stubborn refusal to admire this "respected conservative intellectual" and called the complaints "intolerant" and "fear[ful] of opposing views." Well, thanks to Barack Obama, we can say goodbye and good riddance to all that. As Mr. Springsteen might put it should he show up in Washington on January 20, "These are better days." ■

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Naomi Klein

In Praise of a Rocky Transition

The more details emerge, the clearer it becomes that Washington's handling of the Wall Street bailout is not merely incompetent. It is borderline criminal.

In a moment of high panic in late September, the US Treasury unilaterally pushed through a radical change in how bank mergers are taxed—a change long sought by the industry. Despite the fact that this move will deprive the government of as much as $140 billion in tax revenue, lawmakers found out only after the fact. According to the *Washington Post*, more than a dozen tax attorneys agree that "Treasury had no authority to issue the [tax change] notice."

Of equally dubious legality are the equity deals Treasury has negotiated with many of the country's banks. According to Congressman Barney Frank, one of the architects of the legislation that enables the deals, "Any use of these funds for any purpose other than lending—for bonuses, for severance pay, for dividends, for acquisitions of other institutions, etc.—is a violation of the act." Yet this is exactly how the funds are being used.

Then there is the nearly $2 trillion the Federal Reserve has handed out in emergency loans. Incredibly, the Fed will not reveal which corporations have received these loans or what it has accepted as collateral. Bloomberg News believes that this secrecy violates the law and has filed a federal suit demanding full disclosure.

Despite all of this potential lawlessness, the Democrats are either openly defending the administration or refusing to intervene. "There is only one president at a time," we hear from Barack Obama. That's true. But every sweetheart deal the lame-duck Bush administration makes threatens to hobble Obama's ability to make good on his promise of change. To cite just one example, that $140 billion in missing tax revenue is almost the same sum as Obama's renewable energy program. Obama owes it to the people who elected him to call this what it is: an attempt to undermine the electoral process by stealth.

Yes, there is only one president at a time, but that president needed the support of powerful Democrats, including Obama, to get the bailout passed. Now that it is clear that the Bush administration is violating the terms to which both parties agreed, the Democrats have not just the right but a grave responsibility to intervene forcefully.

I suspect that the real reason the Democrats are so far failing to act has less to do with presidential protocol than with fear: fear that the stock market, which has the temperament of an overindulged 2-year-old, will throw one of its world-shaking tantrums. Disclosing the truth about who is receiving federal loans, we are told, could cause the cranky market to bet against those banks. Question the legality of equity deals and the same thing will happen. Challenge the $140 billion tax giveaway and mergers could fall through. "None of us wants to be blamed for ruining these mergers and creating a new Great Depression," explained one unnamed Congressional aide.

More than that, the Democrats, including Obama, appear to believe that the need to soothe the market should govern all key economic decisions in the transition period. Which is why, just days after a euphoric victory for "change," the mantra abruptly shifted to "smooth transition" and "continuity."

Take Obama's pick for chief of staff. Despite the Republican braying about his partisanship, Rahm Emanuel, the House Democrat who received the most donations from the financial sector, sends an unmistakably reassuring message to Wall Street. When asked on *This Week With George Stephanopoulos* whether Obama would be moving quickly to increase taxes on the wealthy, as promised, Emanuel pointedly did not answer the question.

This same market-coddling logic should, we are told, guide Obama's selection of treasury secretary. Fox News's Stuart Varney explained that Larry Summers, who held the post under Clinton, and former Fed chair Paul Volcker would both "give great confidence to the market." We learned from MSNBC's Joe Scarborough that Summers is the man "the Street would like the most."

Let's be clear about why. "The Street" would cheer a Summers appointment for exactly the same reason the rest of us should fear it: because traders will assume that Summers, champion of financial deregulation under Clinton, will offer a transition from Henry Paulson so smooth we will barely know it happened. Someone like FDIC chair Sheila Bair, on the other hand, would spark fear on the Street—for all the right reasons.

One thing we know for certain is that the market will react violently to any signal that there is a new sheriff in town who will impose serious regulation, invest in people and cut off the free money for corporations. In short, the markets can be relied on to vote in precisely the opposite way that Americans have just voted. (A recent *USA Today*/Gallup poll found that 60 percent of Americans strongly favor "stricter regulations on financial institutions," while just 21 percent support aid to financial companies.)

There is no way to reconcile the public's vote for change with the market's foot-stomping for more of the same. Any and all moves to change course will be met with short-term market shocks. The good news is that once it is clear that the new rules will be applied across the board and with fairness, the market will stabilize and adjust. Furthermore, the timing for this turbulence has never been better. Over the past three months, we've been shocked so frequently that market stability would come as more of a surprise. That gives Obama a window to disregard the calls for a seamless transition and do the hard stuff first. Few will be able to blame him for a crisis that clearly predates him, or fault him for honoring the clearly expressed wishes of the electorate. The longer he waits, however, the more memories fade.

When transferring power from a functional, trustworthy regime, everyone favors a smooth transition. When exiting an era marked by criminality and bankrupt ideology, a little rockiness at the start would be a very good sign. ■

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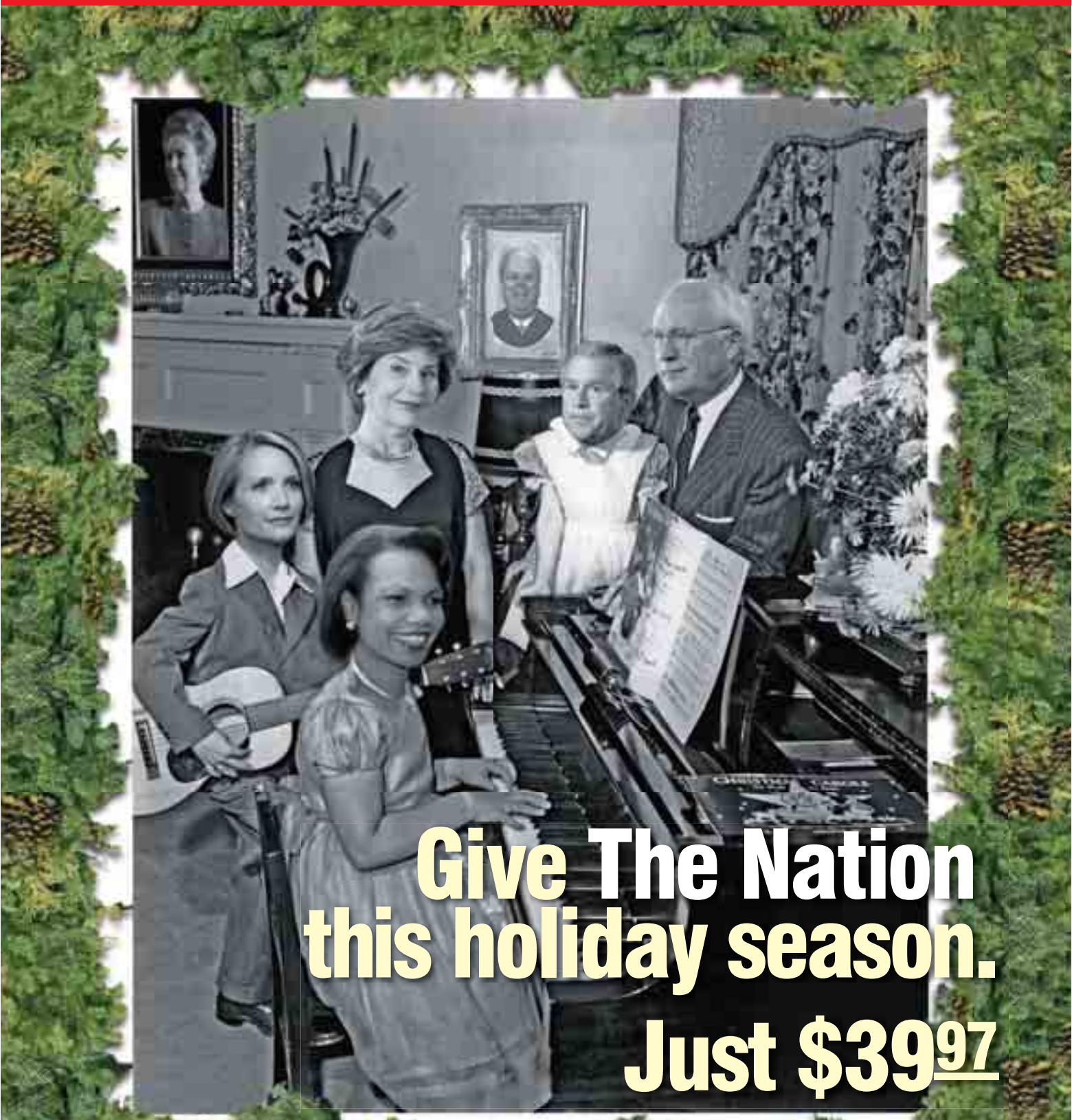

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AP/McINERNEY

A helicopter gunship pulls out of an attack in the Mekong Delta during Speedy Express, January 1969.

A My Lai a Month

In Operation Speedy Express, new evidence of civilian slaughter and cover-up in Vietnam.

by NICK TURSE

By the mid-1960s, the Mekong Delta, with its verdant paddies and canal-side hamlets, was the rice bowl of South Vietnam and home to nearly 6 million Vietnamese. It was also one of the most important revolutionary strongholds during the Vietnam War. Despite its military significance, State Department officials were "deeply concerned" about introducing a large number of US troops into the densely populated area, fearing that it would be impossible to limit civilian carnage.

Yet in late 1968, as peace talks in Paris got under way in earnest, US officials launched a "land rush" to pacify huge swaths of the Delta and bring the population under the control of the South Vietnamese government in Saigon. To this end, from December 1968 through May 1969, a large-scale operation was carried out by the Ninth Infantry Division, with support from nondivision assets ranging from helicopter gunships to B-52 bombers. The offensive, known as Operation Speedy Express, claimed an enemy body count of 10,899 at a cost of only 267 American lives. Although guerrillas were known to be well armed, the division captured only 748 weapons.

In late 1969 Seymour Hersh broke the story of the 1968 My Lai massacre, during which US troops slaughtered more than 500 civilians in Quang Ngai Province, far north of the Delta. Some months later, in May 1970, a self-described "grunt" who participated in Speedy Express wrote a confidential letter to William Westmoreland, then Army chief of staff, saying that the Ninth Division's atrocities amounted to "a My Lay each month for over a year." In his 1976 memoir *A Soldier Reports*, Westmoreland insisted, "The Army investigated every case [of possible war crimes], no matter who made the allegation," and claimed that "none of the crimes even remotely approached the magnitude and horror of My Lai." Yet he personally took action to quash an investigation into the large-scale atrocities described in the soldier's letter.

I uncovered that letter and two others, each unsigned or signed only "Concerned Sergeant," in the National Archives in 2002, in a collection of files about the sergeant's case that had been declassified but forgotten, launching what became a years-long investigation. Records show that his allegations—of helicopter gunships mowing down noncombatants, of airstrikes on villages, of farmers gunned down in their fields while commanders pressed relentlessly for high body counts—were a source of high-level concern. A review of the letter by a Pentagon expert found his claims to be extremely plausible, and military officials tentatively identified the letter writer as George Lewis, a Purple Heart recipient who served with the Ninth Division in the Delta from June 1968 through May 1969. Yet there is no record that investigators ever contacted him. Now, through my own investigation—using material from four major collections of archival and personal papers, including confidential letters, accounts of secret Pentagon briefings, unpublished interviews with Vietnamese survivors and military officials conducted in the 1970s by *Newsweek* reporters, as well as fresh interviews with Ninth Division officers and enlisted personnel—I have been able to corroborate the sergeant's horrific claims. The investigation paints a disturbing picture of civilian slaughter on a scale that indeed dwarfs My Lai, and of a cover-up at the Army's highest levels. The killings were no accident or aber-

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ration. They were instead the result of command policies that turned wide swaths of the Mekong Delta into "free-fire zones" in a relentless effort to achieve a high body count. While the carnage in the Delta did not begin or end with Speedy Express, the operation provides a harsh new snapshot of the abject slaughter that typified US actions during the Vietnam War.

The Concerned Sergeant

An inkling that something terrible had taken place in the Mekong Delta appeared in a most unlikely source—a formerly confidential September 1969 Senior Officer Debriefing Report by none other than the commander of the Ninth Division, then Maj. Gen. Julian Ewell, who came to be known inside the military as "the Butcher of the Delta" because of his single-minded fixation on body count. In the report, copies of which were sent to Westmoreland's office and to other high-ranking officials, Ewell candidly noted that while the Ninth Division stressed the "discriminate and selective use of firepower," in some areas of the Delta "where this emphasis wasn't applied or wasn't feasible, the countryside looked like the Verdun battlefields," the site of a notoriously bloody World War I battle.

'If I am only 10% right…then [there were] 120–150 murders, or a My Lay each month for over a year.' —a "concerned" sergeant

That December, a document produced by the National Liberation Front sharpened the picture. It reported that between December 1, 1968, and April 1, 1969, primarily in the Delta provinces of Kien Hoa and Dinh Tuong, the "9th Division launched an 'express raid'" and "mopped up many areas, slaughtering 3,000 people, mostly old folks, women and children, and destroying thousands of houses, hundreds of hectares of fields and orchards." But like most NLF reports of civilian atrocities, this one was almost certainly dismissed as propaganda by US officials. A United Press International report that same month, in which US advisers charged the division with having driven up the body count by killing civilians with helicopter gunships and artillery, was also largely ignored.

Then, in May 1970, the Concerned Sergeant's ten-page letter arrived in Westmoreland's office, charging that he had "information about things as bad as My Lay" and laying out, in detail, the human cost of Operation Speedy Express.

In that first letter, the sergeant wrote not of a handful of massacres but of official command policies that had led to the killings of thousands of innocents:

> Sir, the 9th Division did nothing to prevent the killing, and by pushing the body the count so hard, we were "told" to kill many times more Vietnamese than at My Lay, and very few per cents of them did we know were enemy.…
>
> In case you don't think I mean lots of Vietnamese got killed this way, I can give you some idea how many. A batalion would kill maybe 15 to 20 a day. With 4 batalions in the Brigade that would be maybe 40 to 50 a day or 1200 to 1500 a month, easy. (One batalion claimed almost 1000 body counts one month!) If I am only 10% right, and believe me its lots more, then I am trying to tell you about 120-150 murders, or a My Lay each month for over a year.…
>
> The snipers would get 5 or 10 a day, and I think all 4 batalions had sniper teams. Thats 20 a day or at least 600 each month. Again, if I am 10% right then the snipers [alone] were a My Lay every other month.

In this letter, and two more sent the following year to other high-ranking generals, the sergeant reported that artilery, airstrikes and helicopter gunships had wreaked havoc on populated areas. All it would take, he said, were a few shots from a village or a nearby tree line and troops would "always call for artilery or gunships or airstrikes." "Lots of times," he wrote, "it would get called for even if we didn't get shot at. And then when [we would] get in the village there would be women and kids crying and sometimes hurt or dead." The attacks were excused, he said, because the areas were deemed free-fire zones.

The sergeant wrote that the unit's policy was to shoot not only guerrilla fighters (whom US troops called Vietcong or VC) but anyone who ran. This was the "Number one killer" of unarmed civilians, he wrote, explaining that helicopters "would hover over a guy in the fields till he got scared and run and they'd zap him" and that the Ninth Division's snipers gunned down farmers from long range to increase the body count. He reported that it was common to detain unarmed civilians and force them to walk in front of a unit's point man in order to trip enemy booby traps. "None [of] us wanted to get blown away," he wrote, "but it wasn't right to use…civilians to set the mines off." He also explained the pitifully low weapons ratio:

> compare them [body count records] with the number of weapons we got. Not the cashays [caches], or the weapons we found after a big fight with the hard cores, but a dead VC with a weapon. The General just had to know about the wrong killings over the weapons. If we reported weapons we had to turn them in, so we would say that the weapons was destroyed by bullets or dropped in a canal or pad[d]y. In the dry season, before the moonsons, there was places where lots of the canals was dry and all the pad[dies] were. The General must have known this was made up.

According to the Concerned Sergeant, these killings all took place for one reason: "the General in charge and all the commanders, riding us all the time to get a big body count." He noted, "Nobody ever gave direct orders to 'shoot civilians' that I know of, but the results didn't show any different than if…they had ordered it. The Vietnamese were dead, victims of the body count pressure and nobody cared enough to try to stop it."

Nick Turse is associate editor of Tomdispatch.com. He is the author of The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives *and a forthcoming history of US war crimes in Vietnam,* Kill Anything That Moves *(both Metropolitan).* *Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute. Research assistance was provided by George Schulz of the Center for Investigative Reporting, Sousan Hammad and Sophie Ragsdale.*

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The Butcher of the Delta and Rice Paddy Daddy

During Ewell's time commanding the Ninth Division, from February 1968 to April 1969, his units achieved remarkably high kill ratios. While the historical US average was ten to one, Ewell's troops reportedly achieved seventy-six to one in March 1969. Ewell's obsession with body count was enthusiastically shared by his deputy, then Col. Ira "Jim" Hunt, who served as a brigade commander in the Ninth Division and as Ewell's chief of staff.

"Hunt, who was our Brigade Commander for awhile and then was an assistant general…used to holler and curse over the radio and talk about the goddamn gooks, and tell the gunships to shoot the sonofabitches, this is a free fire zone," wrote the Concerned Sergeant. Hunt, he said, "didn't care about the Vietnamese or us,

US ARMY

Ninth Division commander Maj. Gen. Julian Ewell (center) and his deputy, Col. Ira Hunt (right)

he just wanted the most of everything, including body count"; "Hunt was…always cussing and screaming over the radio from his C and See [Command and Control helicopter] to the GIs or the gunships to shoot some Vietnamese he saw running when he didn't know if they had a weapon or was women or what."

The sergeant wrote that his unit's artillery forward observer (FO) "would tell my company commander he couldn't shoot in the village because it was in the population overlay." The battalion commander would then "get mad and cuss over the radio at my company commander and…declare a contact [with the enemy] so the FO would shoot anyway. I was there, and we wasn't in contact but my company commander and the FO would do anything to get the COL [colonel] off there back." He went on, "He wouldn't even listen when the FO wanted to wait till after dark and use air burst WP [white phosphorus] rounds to adjust…so as not to zap any hooches." Instead, the colonel said "it had to be HE [high explosive] right in the houses."

In a 2006 interview I conducted with Deborah Nelson, then a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, Ira Hunt claimed that the Ninth Division did not fire artillery near villages. He also denied any knowledge of the Concerned Sergeant's allegations and argued against the notion that a command emphasis on body count led to the mass killing of civilians. "No one's going to say that innocent civilians aren't killed in wartime, but we try to keep it down to the absolute minimum," he said. "The civilian deaths are anathema, but we did our best to protect civilians. I find it unbelievable that people would go out and shoot innocent civilians just to increase a body count." But interviews with several participants in Speedy Express, together with public testimony and published accounts, strongly confirm the allegations in the sergeant's letters.

The Concerned Sergeant's battalion commander, referred to in the letters, was the late David Hackworth, who took command of the Ninth Division's 4/39th Infantry in January 1969. In a 2002 memoir, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*, he echoed the sergeant's allegations about the overwhelming pressure to produce high body counts. "A lot of innocent Vietnamese civilians got slaughtered because of the Ewell-Hunt drive to have the highest count in the land," he wrote. He also noted that when Hunt submitted a recommendation for a citation, citing a huge kill ratio, he left out the uncomfortable fact that "the 9th Division had the lowest weapons-captured-to-enemy-killed ratio in Vietnam."

During Speedy Express, Maj. William Taylor Jr. saw Hunt in action, too, and in a September interview he echoed the Concerned Sergeant's assessment. Now a retired colonel and senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Taylor recalled flying over rice paddies with Hunt: "He said something to the pilot, and all of a sudden the door gunner was firing a .50-caliber machine gun out the door, and I said, 'What the hell is that?' He said, 'See those black pajamas down there in the rice paddies? They're Vietcong. We just killed two of them.'" Immediately afterward, Hunt spoke again to the pilot. "He was talking body count," Taylor said. "Reporting body count." Later he asked Hunt how he could identify VC from the helicopter, without seeing weapons or receiving ground fire. "He said, 'Because they're wearing black pajamas.' I said, 'Well, Sir, I thought workers in the fields wore black pajamas.' He said, 'No, not around here. Black pajamas are Vietcong.'"

Like Hackworth, Taylor recalled an overriding emphasis on body count. It was "the most important measure of success, and it came from the personal example of the Ninth Division commander, General Julian Ewell," he said. "I saw it directly. Body count was everything."

In August I spoke with Gary Nordstrom, a combat medic with the Ninth Division's Company C, 2/39th Infantry, during Speedy Express, who described how the body count emphasis filtered down to the field. "For all enlisted people, that was the mentality," he recalled. "Get the body count. Get the body count. Get the body count. It was prevalent everywhere. I think it was the mind-set of the officer corps from the top down." In multiple instances, his unit fired on Vietnamese for no other reason than that they were running. "On at least one occasion," he said, "I went and confirmed that they were dead."

In recent months, I spoke with two Ninth Division officers who feuded with Ewell over division policies. Retired Lt. Gen. Robert Gard, who commanded the division's five artillery battalions during his 1968–69 tour, spoke to me of Ewell's heavy emphasis on body count and said he was never apprised of any restrictions about firing in or near villages. "There isn't any question that our operations resulted in civilian casualties," he told me in July. Gard recalled arguing with Ewell once about firing artillery on a village after receiving mortar fire from it. "I told him no, I thought it was unwise to do that," he said in a 2006 interview with me and Nelson. "We had a confrontation

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on the issue." Gard also served with Hunt, whom he succeeded as division chief of staff. When asked if Hunt, too, pressed for a large body count, Gard responded, "Big time." "Jim Hunt dubbed himself 'Rice Paddy Daddy,'" Gard recalled, referring to Hunt's radio call sign. "He went berserk."

Maj. Edwin Deagle served in the division from July 1968 until June 1969, first as an aide to Ewell and Hunt and then as executive officer (XO) of the division's 2/60th Infantry during Speedy Express. In September he spoke to me about "the tremendous amount of pressure that Ewell put on all of the combat unit operations, including artillery, which tended to create circumstances under which the number of civilian casualties would rise." Concerned specifically that pressure on artillery units had eroded most safeguards on firing near villages, he confronted his commander. "We'll end up killing a lot of civilians," he told Ewell.

Deagle further recalled an incident after he took over as XO when he was listening on the radio as one of his units stumbled into an ambush and lost its company commander, leaving a junior officer in charge. Confused and unable to outmaneuver the enemy forces, the lieutenant called in a helicopter strike with imprecise instructions. "They fired a tremendous amount of 2.75 [mm rockets] into the town," Deagle recalled, "and that killed a total of about 145 family members or Vietnamese civilians."

Deagle undertook extensive statistical analysis of the division and found that the 2/60th, one of ten infantry battalions, accounted for a disproportionate 40 percent of the weapons captured. Yet even in his atypical battalion, a body count mindset prevailed, according to combat medic Wayne Smith, who arrived in the last days of Speedy Express and ultimately served with the 2/60th. "It was all about body count," he recalled in June. When it came to free-fire zones, "Anyone there was fair game," Smith said. "That's how [it] went down. Sometimes they may have had weapons. Other times not. But if they were in an area, we damn sure would try to kill them."

Col. Hunt 'used to holler and curse over the radio and…tell the gunships to shoot the sonofabitches, this is a free fire zone,' wrote the sergeant.

Another American to witness the carnage was John Paul Vann, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who became the chief of US pacification efforts in the Mekong Delta in February 1969. He flew along on some of the Ninth Division's nighttime helicopter operations. According to notes from an unpublished 1975 interview with *New York Times* Vietnam War correspondent Neil Sheehan, Vann's deputy, Col. David Farnham, said Vann found that troops used early night-vision devices to target any and all people, homes or water buffalo they spotted. No attempt was made to determine whether the people were civilians or enemies, and a large number of noncombatants were killed or wounded as a result.

Louis Janowski, who served as an adviser in the Delta during Speedy Express, saw much of the same and was scathing in an internal 1970 end-of-tour report. In it, he called other Delta helicopter operations, known as the Phantom program, a form of "non selective terrorism." "I have flown Phantom III missions and have medivaced enough elderly people and children to firmly believe that the percentage of Viet Cong killed by support assets is roughly equal to the percentage of Viet Cong in the population," he wrote, indicating a pattern of completely indiscriminate killing. "That is, if 8% of the population [of] an area is VC about 8% of the people we kill are VC."

An adviser in another Delta province, Jeffrey Record, also witnessed the carnage visited on civilians by the Phantom program during Speedy Express. In a 1971 *Washington Monthly* article, Record recalled watching as helicopter gunships strafed a herd of water buffalo and the six or seven children tending them. Seconds later, the tranquil paddy had been "transformed into a bloody ooze littered with bits of mangled flesh," Record wrote. "The dead boys and the water buffalo were added to the official body count of the Viet Cong."

The Cover-Up

In April 1969 Ewell was promoted to head II Field Force, Vietnam, then the largest US combat command in the world. That same month, in an AP story, Ira Hunt defended the body count against those who called it a "terrible measure of progress." The story also quoted a senior officer who denied deliberately killing noncombatants, while granting that noncombatant deaths resulted from Ninth Division operations. "'Have we killed innocent civilians?' [he] asked rhetorically during an interview. 'Hell yes,' he replied, 'but so do the South Vietnamese.'"

In the spring of 1970, as Ewell was readying to leave Vietnam to serve as the top US military adviser at the Paris peace talks, R. Kenley Webster, the Army's acting general counsel, read the Concerned Sergeant's letter at Army Secretary Stanley Resor's request. According to a memo Webster wrote at the time, which was among the documents I uncovered in the National Archives, he was "impressed by its forcefulness" and "sincerity" and commissioned an anonymous internal report from a respected Vietnam veteran. That report endorsed the Concerned Sergeant's contentions:

> It is common knowledge that an officer's career can be made or destroyed in Vietnam.… Under such circumstances—and especially if such incentives as stand-downs, R&R [rest and relaxation] allocations, and decorations are tied to body count figures—the pressure to kill indiscriminately, or at least report every Vietnamese casualty as an enemy casualty, would seem to be practically irresistible.

In June 1970 Webster sent a memo, with the review, to Resor, recommending that he confer with Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams, by then the top commander in Vietnam, about the matter. According to Army documents, Resor and Abrams discussed the allegations, but no investigation was launched.

News of the atrocities in the Delta was already leaking into public view. That winter, veterans of Speedy Express spoke out about the killing of civilians at the National Veterans' Inquiry in Washington, and the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit. In April 1971, at hearings chaired by Representative Ronald Dellums, Vietnam veteran West Point graduates testified to Ewell's "body count mania." That same

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month, Record's *Washington Monthly* piece appeared.

Within days, Robert Komer, formerly a deputy to Westmoreland and chief of pacification efforts in Vietnam, wrote to Vann seeking his assessment of the article and noting, "It rings all too true!" In early May 1971, Vann replied to Komer, by then a consultant with the RAND Corporation, that "the US is on very shaky ground on either the Phantom or other 'hunter-killer' airborne missions and literally hundreds of horrible examples have been documented by irate advisors, both military and civilian."

By this time, Ira Hunt had returned from Vietnam and, in a strange twist of fate, was leading the Army's investigation of Col. Oran Henderson, the brigade commander whose unit carried out the My Lai massacre. Although Hunt recommended only an Article 15—a mild, nonjudicial punishment—Henderson was court-martialed. On May 24 Henderson dropped a bombshell, stating that the mass killing was no aberration. "Every unit of brigade size has its My Lai hidden someplace," he said. The only reason they remained unknown was "every unit doesn't have a Ridenhour." In fact, Hunt's brigade did have a whistleblower like Ron Ridenhour, but instead of sending letters to dozens of prominent government and military officials, the Concerned Sergeant fatefully kept his complaints within the Army—fearing, he wrote, that going public would get the Army "in more trouble."

The lack of public exposure allowed the military to paper over the allegations. In August 1971, well over a year after the sergeant's first letter to Westmoreland, an Army memo noted that the Criminal Investigation Division was finally attempting to identify and locate the letter writer—not to investigate his claims but "to prevent his complaints [from] reaching Mr. Dellums." In September Westmoreland's office directed CID to identify the Concerned Sergeant and to "assure him the Army is beginning investigation of his allegations"; within days, CID reported that the division had "tentatively identified" him and would seek an interview. But on the same day as that CID report, a Westmoreland aide wrote a memo stating that the general had sought the advice of Thaddeus Beal, an Army under secretary and civilian lawyer, who counseled that since the Concerned Sergeant's letters were written anonymously, the Army could legitimately discount them. In the memo, the aide summarized Westmoreland's thoughts by saying, "We have done as much as we can do on this case," and "he again reiterated he was not so sure we should send anything out to the field on this matter of general war crimes allegations." Shortly thereafter, at a late September meeting between CID officials and top Army personnel, the investigation that had barely been launched was officially killed.

Burying the Story

In 1971, something caught the eye of Alex Shimkin, a *Newsweek* stringer fluent in Vietnamese, as he pored over documents issued by the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, or MACV, which coordinated all US military activities in South Vietnam: the radically skewed ratio of enemy dead to weapons captured during Speedy Express. At the urging of Kevin Buckley, *Newsweek*'s Saigon bureau chief, and with no knowledge of the Concerned Sergeant's allegations, Shimkin began an exhaustive analysis of MACV documents that offered dates, locations and detailed statistics. From there, he and Buckley began to dig.

They interviewed US civilian and military officials at all levels, combed through civilian hospital records and traveled into areas of the Delta hardest hit by Speedy Express to talk to Vietnamese survivors. What they learned—much of it documented in unpublished interviews and notes that I recently obtained from Buckley—echoed exactly what the Concerned Sergeant confided to Westmoreland and the other top generals. Their sources all assured them there was no shortage of arms among the enemy to account for the gross kills-to-weapons disparity. The only explanation for the ratio, they discovered, was that a great many of the dead were civilians. Huge numbers of airstrikes had decimated the countryside. Withering artillery and mortar barrages were carried out around the clock. Many, if not most, kills were logged by helicopters and occurred at night.

"The horror was worse than My Lai," one American official familiar with the Ninth Infantry Division's operations in the Delta told Buckley. "But with the 9th, the civilian casualties came in dribbles and were pieced out over a long time. And most of them were inflicted from the air and at night. Also, they were sanctioned by the command's insistence on high body counts." Another quantified the matter, stating that as many as 5,000 of those killed during the operation were civilians.

> 'Get the body count. It was prevalent.... I think it was the mind-set of the officer corps from the top down.' —combat medic Gary Nordstrom

Accounts from Vietnamese survivors in Kien Hoa and Dinh Tuong echoed the scenarios related by the Concerned Sergeant. Buckley and Shimkin spoke to a group of village elders who knew of thirty civilians who were killed when US troops used them as human mine detectors. An elderly Vietnamese man from Kien Hoa told them, "The Americans destroyed every house with artillery, airstrikes or by burning them down with cigarette lighters. About 100 people were killed by bombing." Another man, Mr. Hien, recalled, "The helicopters shot up the area even in daylight because people working in their fields and gardens would become afraid when the helicopters approached, and began to run away."

Another older man from Kien Hoa, Mr. Ba, recalled, "When the Americans came in early 1969 there was artillery fire on the village every night and several B-52 strikes which plowed up the earth." Not only did MACV records show bombings in the exact area of the village; the account was confirmed by interviews with a local Vietcong medic who later joined the US-allied South Vietnamese forces. He told them that "hundreds of artillery rounds landed in the village, causing many casualties." He continued, "I worked for a [National Liberation] Front doctor and he often operated on forty or more people a day. His hospital took care of at least a thousand people from four villages in early 1969."

Buckley and Shimkin found records showing that during

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Speedy Express, 76 percent of the 1,882 war-injured civilians treated in the Ben Tre provincial hospital in Kien Hoa—which served only one tiny area of the vast Delta—were wounded by US firepower. And even this large number was likely an undercount of casualties. "Many people who were wounded died on their way to hospitals," said one US official. "Many others were treated at home, or in hospitals run by the VC, or in small dispensaries operated by the [South Vietnamese Army]. The people who got to Ben Tre were lucky."

In November 1971 Buckley sent a letter to MACV that echoed the Concerned Sergeant's claims of mass carnage during Speedy Express. Citing the lopsided kills-to-weapons ratio, Buckley wrote, "Research in the area by *Newsweek* indicates that a considerable proportion of those people killed were non-combatant civilians." On December 2 MACV confirmed the ratio and many of Buckley's details: "A high percentage of casualties were inflicted at night"; "A high percentage of the casualties were inflicted by the Air Cavalry and Army Aviation [helicopter] units"; but with caveats and the insistence that MACV was unable to substantiate the "claim that a considerable proportion of the casualties were non-combatant civilians." Instead, MACV contended that many of the dead were unarmed guerrillas. In response to Buckley's request to interview MACV commander Creighton Abrams, MACV stated that Abrams, who had been briefed on the Concerned Sergeant's allegations the year before, had "no additional information." Most of Buckley's follow-up questions, sent in December, went unanswered.

One American official told Buckley and Shimkin that as many as 5,000 of those killed during Speedy Express were civilians.

But according to Neil Sheehan's interview with Colonel Farnham, who served as deputy to Vann, by then the third-most-powerful American serving in Vietnam, word of the forthcoming *Newsweek* story had spread. In late 1971 or early 1972 Vann met in Washington with Westmoreland and Army Vice Chief of Staff Bruce Palmer Jr. Before the meeting Vann told Farnham about the upcoming *Newsweek* article and said that he was ducking Buckley in order to avoid questions about Speedy Express. At the meeting, which Farnham attended, Vann told Westmoreland and Palmer that Ewell's Ninth Division had wantonly killed civilians in the Mekong Delta in order to boost the body count and further the general's career, singling out nighttime helicopter gunship missions as the worst of the division's tactics. According to Farnham, Vann said Speedy Express was, in effect, "many My Lais"—closely echoing the language of the Concerned Sergeant. Farnham said Westmoreland put on a "masterful job of acting," claiming repeatedly that he had never before heard such allegations. When Vann mentioned Buckley's upcoming exposé, Westmoreland directed his aide and Farnham to leave the room because he, Palmer and Vann needed to discuss "a very sensitive subject."

In the end, Buckley and Shimkin's nearly 5,000-word investigation, including a compelling sidebar of eyewitness testimony from Vietnamese survivors, was nixed by *Newsweek*'s top editors, who expressed concern that such a piece would constitute a "gratuitous" attack on the Nixon administration [see "The Vietnam Exposé That Wasn't," at thenation.com, which discusses Buckley and Shimkin's investigation of atrocities, including one by a Navy SEAL team led by future Senator Bob Kerrey]. Buckley argued in a cable that the piece was more than an atrocity exposé. "It is to say," Buckley wrote in late January 1972, "that day in and day out that [the Ninth] Division killed non combatants with firepower that was anything but indiscriminate. The application of firepower was based on the judgment that anybody who ran was an enemy and indeed, that anyone who lived in the area could be killed." A truncated, 1,800-word piece finally ran in June 1972, but many key facts, eyewitness interviews, even mention of Julian Ewell's name, were left on the cutting-room floor. In its eviscerated form, the article resulted in only a ripple of interest.

Days before the story appeared, Vann died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam and, a few weeks later, Shimkin was killed when he mistakenly crossed North Vietnamese lines. The story of Speedy Express died, too.

Ewell retired from the Army in 1973 as a lieutenant general but was invited by the Army chief of staff to work with Ira Hunt in detailing their methods to aid in developing "future operational concepts." Until now, Ewell and Hunt had the final word on Operation Speedy Express, in their 1974 Army Vietnam Studies book *Sharpening the Combat Edge*. While the name of the operation is absent from the text, they lauded both the results and the brutal techniques decried by the Concerned Sergeant, including nighttime helicopter operations and the aggressive use of snipers. In the book's final pages, they made oblique reference to the allegations that erupted in 1970 only to be quashed by Westmoreland. "The 9th Infantry Division and II Field Force, Vietnam have been criticized on the grounds that 'their obsession with body count' was either basically wrong or else led to undesirable practices," they wrote, before quickly dispatching those claims. "The basic inference that they were 'obsessed with body count' is not true," they wrote, asserting instead that their methods ended up "'unbrutalizing' the war."

Ewell now lives in Virginia. During a 2006 visit I made to his home with Deborah Nelson, Ewell's wife told us he no longer grants interviews. Ira Hunt retired from active duty in 1978 as a major general. He too lives in Virginia.

George Lewis, the man tentatively identified by the Army as the Concerned Sergeant, hailed from Sharpsburg, Kentucky. He was awarded a Purple Heart as well as Army Commendation Medals with a "V" for valor for his service in Vietnam and was formally discharged in 1974. Lewis died in 2004, at age 56, before I was able to locate him.

To this day, Vietnamese civilians in the Mekong Delta recall the horrors of Operation Speedy Express and the countless civilians killed to drive up body count. Army records indicate that no Ninth Infantry Division troops, let alone commanders, were ever court-martialed for killing civilians during the operation. ■

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ALEX BRANDON/AP PHOTO

A crowd cheers the Democratic candidate for president at a rally in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on September 4.

Obama Needs a Protest Movement

As with FDR in the 1930s, a grassroots push for reform can make Obama a great president.

by FRANCES FOX PIVEN

The astonishing election of 2008 is over. Whatever else the future holds, the unchallenged domination of American national government by big business and the political right has been broken. Even more amazing, Americans have elected an African-American as president. These facts alone are rightful cause for jubilation.

Naturally, people are making lists of what the new administration should do to begin to reverse the decades-long trends toward rising inequality, unrestrained corporate plunder, ecological disaster, military adventurism and constricted democracy. But if naming our favored policies is the main thing we do, we are headed for a terrible letdown. Let's face it: Barack Obama is not a visionary or even a movement leader. He became the nominee of the Democratic Party, and then went on to win the general election, because he is a skillful politician. That means he will calculate whom he has to conciliate and whom he can ignore in realms dominated by big-money contributors from Wall Street, powerful business lobbyists and a Congress that includes conservative Blue Dog and Wall Street–oriented Democrats. I don't say this to disparage Obama. It is simply the way it is, and if Obama was not the centrist and conciliator he is, he would not have come this far this fast, and he would not be the president-elect.

Still, the conditions that influence politicians can change. The promises and hopes generated by election campaigns sometimes help to raise hopes and set democratic forces in motion that break the grip of politics as usual. I don't mean that the Obama campaign operation is likely to be transformed into a continuing movement for reform. A campaign mobilization is almost surely too flimsy and too dependent on the candidate to generate the weighty pressures that can hold politicians accountable. Still, the soaring rhetoric of the campaign; the slogans like "We are the ones we have been waiting for"; the huge, young and enthusiastic crowds—all this generates hope, and hope fuels activism among people who otherwise accept politics as usual.

Sometimes, encouraged by electoral shifts and campaign promises, the ordinary people who are typically given short shrift in political calculation become volatile and unruly, impatient with the same old promises and ruses, and they refuse to cooperate in the institutional routines that depend on their cooperation. When that happens, their issues acquire a white-hot urgency, and politicians have to respond, because they are politicians. In other words, the disorder, stoppages and institutional breakdowns generated by this sort of collective action threaten politicians. These periods of mass defiance are unnerving, and many authoritative voices are even now pointing to the dangers of pushing the Obama administration too hard and too far. Yet these are also the moments when ordinary people enter into the political life of the country and authentic bottom-up reform becomes possible.

The parallels between the election of 2008 and the election of 1932 are often invoked, with good reason. It is not just that Obama's oratory is reminiscent of FDR's oratory, or that both men were brought into office as a result of big electoral shifts, or that both took power at a moment of economic catastrophe. All this is true, of course. But I want to make a different point: FDR became a great president because the mass protests among the unemployed, the aged, farmers and workers forced him to make choices he would otherwise have avoided. He did not set out to initiate big new policies. The Democratic platform of 1932 was not much different from that of 1924 or 1928. But the rise of protest movements forced the new president and the Democratic Congress to become bold reformers.

The movements of the 1930s were often set in motion by radical agitators—Communists, Socialists, Musteites—but they were fueled by desperation and economic calamity. Unemploy-

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ment demonstrations, usually (and often not without reason) labeled riots by the press, began in 1929 and 1930, as crowds assembled, raised demands for "bread or wages," and then marched on City Hall or local relief offices. In some places, "bread riots" broke out as crowds of the unemployed marched on storekeepers to demand food, or simply to take it.

In the big cities, mobs used strong-arm tactics to resist the rising numbers of evictions. In Harlem and on the Lower East Side, crowds numbering in the thousands gathered to restore evicted families to their homes. In Chicago, small groups of black activists marched through the streets of the ghetto to mobilize the large crowds that would reinstall evicted families. A rent riot there left three people dead and three policemen injured in August 1931, but Mayor Anton Cermak ordered a moratorium on evictions, and some of the rioters got work relief. Later, in the summer of 1932, Cermak told a House committee that if the federal government didn't send $150 million for relief immediately, it should be prepared to send troops later. Even in Mississippi, Governor Theodore Bilbo told an interviewer, "Folks are restless. Communism is gaining a foothold. Right here in Mississippi, some people are about ready to lead a mob. In fact, I'm getting a little pink myself." Meanwhile, also in the summer of 1932, farmers across the country armed themselves with pitchforks and clubs to prevent the delivery of farm products to markets where the price paid frequently did not cover the cost of production.

Notwithstanding the traditional and conservative platform of the Democratic Party, FDR's campaign in 1932 registered these disturbances in new promises to "build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put…faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." Economic conditions worsened in the interim between the election and the inauguration, and the clamor for federal action became more strident. Within weeks, Roosevelt had submitted legislation to Congress for public works spending, massive emergency relief to be implemented by states and localities, agricultural assistance and an (ultimately unsuccessful) scheme for industrial recovery.

The unruly protests continued, and in many places they were crucial in pressuring reluctant state and local officials to implement the federally initiated aid programs. Then, beginning in 1933, industrial workers inspired by the rhetorical promises of the new administration began to demand the right to organize. By the mid-1930s, mass strikes were a threat to economic recovery and to the Democratic voting majorities that had put FDR in office. A pro-union labor policy was far from Roosevelt's mind when he took office in 1933. But by 1935, with strikes escalating and the election of 1936 approaching, he was ready to sign the National Labor Relations Act.

Obama's campaign speeches emphasized the theme of a unified America where divisions bred by race or party are no longer important. But America is, in fact, divided: by race, by party, by class. And these divisions will matter greatly as we grapple with the whirlwind of financial and economic crises, of prospective ecological calamity, of generational and political change, of widening fissures in the American empire. I, for one, do not have a blueprint for the future. Maybe we are truly on the cusp of a new world order, and maybe it will be a better, more humane order. In the meantime, however, our government will move on particular policies to confront the immediate crisis. Whether most Americans will have an effective voice in these policies will depend on whether we tap our usually hidden source of power, our ability to refuse to cooperate on the terms imposed from above. ■

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A New, Blue Dixie

Obama's "Southern Strategy" pays off.

by BOB MOSER

It was hot as Hades on June 5 in the little mountain town of Bristol, Virginia. But that didn't stop hundreds of southwest Virginians—in the most staunchly Republican part of a state that hadn't voted Democratic for president since 1964—from streaming into the local high school gym to whoop it up for a liberal, mixed-race fellow from Chicago with a mighty suspicious moniker. Fresh off his lopsided, nomination-clinching primary victory in North Carolina, Barack Obama had chosen—to the mystification of political experts—to launch his general election campaign not in the "battlegrounds" of Pennsylvania or Ohio but in a remote Southern backwater containing 17,000 souls who'd given George W. Bush 64 percent of their vote in 2004.

Strangest of all, he spoke to these people in exactly the same way he had addressed stadiums full of urbanites in Philadelphia or Cleveland. "It's not just struggles overseas. It's also struggles here at home that are causing so much anxiety," he declared without the merest hint of a drawl. "Everywhere I go, I meet people. They are struggling to get by. We just went through an economic expansion period…where corporate profits were up, the stock market was up…and the average family income went down by a thousand dollars. The first time it had ever happened since World War II where the economy's growing, but you have less money in your pocket."

The folks in Bristol cheered at that, and they listened attentively as Obama detailed his healthcare plan. But what brought them to their feet was this: "When I announced [my candidacy] I was convinced the American people were tired of being divided—divided by race, divided by religion, divided by region."

From the start of his campaign, when he brashly promised to compete and win in Southern states, Obama grasped something that only Howard Dean, among Democratic heavyweights, had recognized: not only was the South changing fast, demographically and culturally, but nobody had more reason to be sick to death of all those artificial divisions than Southerners themselves. For forty years, the South had been shunned and denigrated by national Democrats who looked at the country's larg-

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est chunk of voters and saw nothing but a uniform sea of racist, fundamentalist, xenophobic dimwits.

Efforts to appeal to these mental and moral midgets, Democratic pundit Tom Schaller argued in his much-cited 2006 book, *Whistling Past Dixie*, had only watered down the party's progressive message. "When Democrats give the president authority to start a preemptive war in Iraq, they accede to Southern bellicosity," Schaller wrote. "When Democrats go soft on defending social policies, they lend credence to the Southernized, 'starve the beast' mentality of governance. When Democrats scramble around to declare that they, too, have moral values, they kneel in the pews of southern evangelism. This absurdist catering to the worst fitting, least supportive component of the Democratic coalition must cease."

"Everybody always makes the mistake of looking South," John Kerry repeatedly huffed during the 2004 primaries. Like Al Gore before him, Kerry avoided that "mistake" with a vengeance, shutting down his campaign efforts in every Southern state but Florida before Labor Day and refusing to set foot, even once, in Democratic-trending states like Virginia during the general election campaign. The South? Republicans could have it.

Obama begged to differ. Conventional wisdom advised Democratic presidential candidates to bend over backward to look like "regular" Southern guys—tote a gun, adopt an accent, pretend to be a NASCAR freak, run around with a Holy Bible tucked under each arm and, if all else failed, campaign atop a hay bale (as Michael Dukakis once did in North Carolina). Obama, precisely the kind of Democrat who was supposed to be an impossible sell in the South, eschewed such fakery. He looked South and saw not stereotypes but—wonder of wonders!—Americans.

The Senator from Illinois showed up to campaign not just in exploding urban and suburban areas (where he won big) but also in towns like Bristol. He talked—seriously, soberly, in detail—about healthcare, the climate crisis, education and kitchen-table economics. He understood that while most Southerners remain cultural traditionalists, they are also increasingly progressive on economic and environmental issues. That insight best explains why Obama won three of the region's five largest states (Virginia, North Carolina and Florida), and earned the fifty-five electoral votes that lifted him from a narrow victory to a landslide.

And voilà! The wedge issues that had fueled the GOP's Southern successes ever since Richard Nixon became afterthoughts, not obsessions—try as the Republicans did to stoke the same old fires. It was in Guilford County, North Carolina, where Sarah Palin made her controversial proclamation that she was happy to be in "Real America." On election day, Guilford County went 59 to 41 percent for Obama, a nine-point swing from 2004.

As soon as the incongruous results from Dixie came in, the pundits and pols began scrambling to explain them away. Surely something fluky had happened. Obama had won, some said, on the strength of record black turnout and support—eliding the fact that he'd won considerably more white votes in the region than Kerry, and that the most heavily black states in the South had remained Republican. It had been such a historically lousy year for Republicans, others insisted, that they were bound to lose even some Southern turf—ignoring the fact that Obama made his gains by out-organizing Southern Republicans for the first time in modern history. (In North Carolina alone, the campaign had fifty field offices and more than 20,000 volunteers.)

Regionwide, Obama won the majority of the under-35 vote from all races. He doubled Kerry's vote among young white evangelicals. He blew McCain away among Latinos—the South's swing vote of the future. And he did it with the same message and same organizing that fueled his victory in the rest of the country. America, he said shortly before the election in another Virginia town, Roanoke, "will rise or fall as one nation."

As we say in the South, it's about damn time. ■

Bob Moser, a Nation *contributing editor, is editor of* The Texas Observer *and author of* Blue Dixie: Awakening the South's Democratic Majority *(Times Books).*

Cool Hand Luke

The plumber who helped deliver Indiana for Obama.

by MARK HERTSGAARD

Elkhart, Indiana

If you want to understand how Barack Obama won the 2008 election—and how the great changes he talks about the United States making over the next four years can be achieved—come to Indiana and meet Luke the Plumber. Unlike the media darling Joe the Plumber, who wasn't really a plumber and who favored John McCain, Luke Lefever is a licensed plumber who spent many hours this fall volunteering for Obama. Lefever's hometown of Elkhart is in northern Indiana, traditionally a very red area of a very red state; no Democrat had won a presidential election here since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. In the more distant past, Indiana was a stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan, which still has local followers, said Lefever: "Up until a few years ago, the mother of the Klan's Grand Wizard lived in Goshen [five miles from Elkhart]. She sewed all of their uniforms."

But Elkhart, like much of Indiana, has been suffering economically. The city is the nation's capital of recreational vehicle manufacturing; driving into town, you pass a plant whose parking lot is filled with long rows of brand-new, unsold Hummers. This year's rise in gasoline prices hammered Elkhart; unemployment doubled over the past twelve months, to 9.3 percent. Sensing an opportunity, the national Obama campaign invested heavily in Elkhart County, sending the candidate there twice and putting four paid organizers on the ground in the city. Comparable efforts were made in other strategically chosen areas of Indiana. Buoyed by 80,000 volunteers, this commitment to grassroots organizing yielded one of the great surprises of the election: Indiana went for Obama by 27,000 votes.

When I reached Elkhart late in the afternoon on election

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day, Lefever was pacing the sidewalk in front of the precinct office, a modest bungalow in a black working-class neighborhood. Cellphone to his ear, the plumber, a white, married father of two, was telling a fellow campaign worker that a car full of volunteers would soon leave to surround a nearby polling station. "We want to make sure that everyone in line to vote at 6 PM—the hour polls close in Indiana—is able to vote," as state law prescribed, he said. "We've seen awesome turnout in the six precincts we're working," Lefever told me, emphasizing that he was but one member of the team of activists here. "We're estimating it could be 400 percent higher than in 2004" in one heavily nonwhite precinct. In fact, turnout in that precinct was almost 500 percent higher. "In 2004, Bush won 70 percent of the vote in Elkhart County," Lefever said two days later. "This year, McCain won only 55 percent of the vote. By shaving [the Republican] margin here, we helped Obama win the state."

"Obama didn't write off Indiana, and he didn't write off Elkhart," said Jonathan Swain, former communications director for the Obama campaign in Indiana. "If you look on an Indiana map at which counties went red and which went blue in this election, it doesn't tell the whole story. Fifteen of Indiana's ninety-two counties went for Obama; seventy-seven counties went for McCain. But we ran a ninety-two county campaign. And in county after county, Obama made McCain's margin of victory smaller, in some cases much smaller, than Bush's margins were in 2004. Then Obama won big in the more urban areas of the state by turning out every vote we could there."

The Elkhart precincts I visited were heavily African-American and Latino, but the county as a whole is predominantly white. The Obama campaign made a point of appealing to both constituencies, employing the same two-track strategy it applied throughout the state. In essence, Obama won Indiana by reaching out to white voters who traditionally had not voted Democratic—independents and Republicans feeling the economic pinch—and by getting hundreds of thousands of first-time voters to go to the polls. The Indiana secretary of state's postelection data show there were 345,632 new voters in 2008. That's about 13 percent of the total turnout of 2.7 million. More to the point, it's roughly equal to how much better Obama did in 2008 than John Kerry did in 2004. In 2004 Bush won 1,479,438 votes in Indiana and beat Kerry 60 to 39 percent. In 2008 McCain scored only slightly less than Bush did four years before, but Obama won 398,492 more votes than Kerry did—enough for a 1 percent victory margin.

The McCain campaign and top Indiana Republicans never knew what hit them; they had only contempt for community organizing. As late as mid-September, senior McCain officials in Indiana were saying that Obama had no chance and was only spending time and money there to force McCain to do so as well. "We want [the GOP] to put resources in the true battleground states," Kevin Ober, the Indiana Republican Party's executive director, told *Time* magazine. Before 2008, the national Democratic Party was just as close-minded about Indiana, said Luke the Plumber. "Indiana had not gone Democratic for president in my lifetime, so the party just gave up on us," said Lefever, a grinning 35-year-old, who added that he had never before worked on a political campaign. "This election is the first time we had TV ads in Indiana. Democrats were essentially disenfranchised here. People saw no point in voting or getting involved because we were bound to lose. But Obama put real resources into Indiana, and now we get a say in what happens here."

Three lessons stand out from Obama's victory in Indiana. First, do not write off places that have traditionally voted Republican—compete in all fifty states, as long advocated by outgoing Democratic Party national chairman Howard Dean. Second, invest in grassroots community organizing and empower local volunteers. "Some people made light of the community organizing approach this campaign took, but look at Indiana and you see the power of neighbors talking to neighbors," Swain said. "TV ads are important, but you are much more apt to listen when it's your neighbors talking about why they support Obama." And finally, give people a candidate worth voting for. "People in Indiana were tired of Bush, and the economic crisis made them ready for a new direction," said Lefever. "But that wasn't enough. Obama showed people he understood the problems they faced, and he offered new ideas for confronting those problems. I think that's why we won." ■

Mark Hertsgaard, The Nation's environment correspondent, is a fellow of The Nation Institute and the author of five books, including Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future. *His next book is* Living Through the Storm: Our Future Under Global Warming.

Letters

(continued from page 2)

From pointing out, again and again, Homer Bigart's writings about Vietnam in the *New York Times* and his warnings, which proved exactly correct, through descriptions of the far right, which as a student I was certain were too extreme—my, my, no they weren't. Compared with the truth as it has come out, your comments were quite moderate.

The Nation is not a magazine to read to get happy. I don't read it when I'm too low to take a heavy shot of depressing insight. But the happy part is that good thinking is being published, and being read, and that is probably the best news.

BOB BURKET

Confucius Confusion

PHILADELPHIA

Richard Low incorrectly asserts that Orville Schell "misplaced" Confucius's saying "The moral power of the junzi is like the wind; the moral power of the common people is like the grass. When blown, the grass cannot but bend before the wind" ["Letters," Nov. 17]. The verse is indeed found in the Analects (12:19 in both the Lau and Legge translations). It is also, as Low asserts, quoted in Book III of Mencius.

WILLIAM GROSNICK

Correction

In William Greider's "Establishment Disorder" (Nov. 17), the phrase "malefactors of great wealth" should have been attributed to Teddy, not Franklin, Roosevelt.

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City of Shards

by SIDDHARTHA DEB

MARIA SÖDERBERG

Elias Khoury

The fragments of the past never add up to a whole in Beirut. The city seems to communicate in images rather than in narrative, presenting a kaleidoscope of car bomb assassinations and refugee camps, Israeli warplanes and Hezbollah fighters, shards that whirl before our eyes without yielding much meaning. And these pieces are only from recent years, thrown up by a city that already holds in its subterranean layers the 1975–90 civil war, with its militias and massacres, and long before that the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and colonial occupation by the French. When a writer attempts, then, to make Beirut the source of his work, one can understand why the first principle of his aesthetic is that a fragmented city demands a fragmented novel.

Yalo, the tenth novel by Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, is such a book. Published in Arabic in 2002 and now available in a translation by Peter Theroux, *Yalo* is set in 1993 and revolves around a single consciousness unable to make sense of itself or its surroundings. Its opening sentence is "Yalo did not understand what was happening," and its closing line is "And if I don't find the end of the story, how will I be able to write it?" In between lies a work that is both one story and several, perpetually revised under the torque of history, memory, desire, fear, understanding and loathing.

The novel mostly takes the form of a series of confessions ripped out of Yalo, a young Lebanese Christian man in prison for rape and robbery. Although only in his 20s, Yalo is a hardened veteran of Lebanon's civil war. He knows a lot about urban warfare but not enough about fellow fighters like Tony Atiq, who hatches the idea of stealing money from the militia barracks and escaping to France to live off the spoils. Yalo accompanies Atiq to Paris, where he is promptly deserted by his friend. "I left the hotel and became a *clochard*," Yalo recalls in one of his many confessions, his language wavering between the lyrical and the banal:

> That's what they call homeless people there. I became a *clochard*, and didn't have the price of a bite of bread. That is, I became a beggar sleeping in the Métro tunnel at Montparnasse Station.
>
> I met Monsieur Michel Salloum, may God honor him, in the Métro station. He took me to his house at 45, rue Victor Hugo, bathed me, dressed me in new clothes, and fed me. When he heard my story he offered me a job in Lebanon.

The job is that of a watchman in Salloum's villa, the accessories a Kalashnikov rifle and a flashlight. Yalo adds idiosyncratic touches to the position. He makes love to Salloum's wife when his boss is absent and hovers, in the evenings, at the edge of a nearby forest. At first, dressed in a long black coat and rubber-soled shoes, he does no more than

Yalo
By Elias Khoury.
Translated by Peter Theroux.
Archipelago. 317 pp. $25.

Little Mountain
By Elias Khoury.
Translated by Maia Tabet.
Picador. 140 pp. Paper $13.

Gate of the Sun
By Elias Khoury.
Translated by Humphrey Davies.
Archipelago. 539 pp. $26.

Siddhartha Deb is the author of the novels The Point of Return *and* An Outline of the Republic *(both published by Ecco). He is working on a nonfiction book about contemporary India.*

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watch lovers driving into the forest. Before long, however, Yalo has become a predator, tapping at the windows of a car with his rifle or probing its interior with his flashlight, acts he follows by robbing the men and raping the women.

The lovers Yalo interrupts are not particularly romantic figures. The men are usually well-heeled members of the Lebanese bourgeoisie out on pleasure cruises with prostitutes or troubled young women, willing to abandon their sexual partners at the slightest whiff of danger. Yalo's mistake, in this setting, is to confuse his predatory impulses with passion. After raping a young, urbane woman called Shirin, he decides he has fallen in love with her and takes to meeting her for long conversations about Lebanese food, Arabic music and Egyptian films. Yalo says he is courting her, but Shirin understandably feels she is being stalked, and it is her eventual complaint to the police that will land Yalo in prison, to be charged not only with rape and robbery but also involvement in a bombing plot supposedly orchestrated by Israel.

The idea of literature as witness and confession has quickened Khoury's work for a long time.

Although Yalo is always eager to assure his interrogators of the intense purity of his feelings about Shirin, his almost unthinking capacity to inflict violence seems clear enough. But the establishment of criminal guilt is a fitting end only for a conservative mind. For Khoury, the fact that Yalo has committed some or many of the acts credited to him is only one strand of the story, to be woven in with braids from Yalo's past that show who he was before coming into his inheritance of crime and punishment, as well as how he is remade by a Lebanese state demanding a confession.

The interrogators who question Yalo, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs, possess no names and have few defining features. This is because one sees them from Yalo's point of view. Starved, beaten, humiliated and subject to what the interrogators call "torture parties," Yalo understands quickly enough that he must provide a story these men consider satisfactory. Of course, it becomes apparent that the investigators are not interested in verifying the truth of Yalo's confessions as much as in extracting a version of truth that suits their needs and is presented in a suitably bureaucratic language.

No matter how outrageous the methods of torture might seem—one involves a sack with a cat into which a naked Yalo is inserted, another a Coke bottle on which he is forced to sit—Khoury in some ways is working as a realist in his depiction of the police. In its critical appraisal of the violence of the modern state, *Yalo* is part of a long tradition of Arabic novels concerned with prison and torture, including Saudi-Iraqi novelist Abdelrahman Munif's *East of the Mediterranean* (1975) and Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz's *Karnak Café* (1974). Yet in all other respects, Khoury is not a realist: he forces readers to negotiate shifting points of view, constant revisions in the story and dizzying jumps in time, so that even as one recoils at the violence of the interrogators, one shares some of their dissatisfaction with Yalo's jumbled confessions. It is all so complicated, from Yalo's relationship with Shirin to his interaction with his family members, and so contaminated by injections of politics, history, family and religion, that there are times when our patience with Yalo runs out and we too long for a simpler, linear story.

It is never provided, unless we're willing to accept the court verdict presented near the end of the novel. Yalo's memories, meandering through the past, seem saturated with tenderness as well as violence toward Shirin. He sees himself as her savior, protecting her from other men, including her selfish, plump-thighed fiancé, Emile, and the odious Dr. Said, who carries out her abortion and sexually exploits her. But Shirin too is a savior of sorts for Yalo. She offers him the dream of another kind of life, of becoming part of a Beirut quite different from what he has known, a place of privilege and sophistication that he thinks of almost with an immigrant's yearning:

> Yalo told himself in the mirror when he was shaving the next morning that he would marry Shirin; he would buy all the cuttlefish in the world and eat them with her, and live in her house. He had not said the words "her house," but when he thought about marriage and the house and the children, he saw the entrance to her building and the sycamore tree on the sidewalk opposite and imagined himself under that tree, playing ball with a blond child speaking French. He remembered his grandfather and wondered how he would speak with his grandson's son, and in what language?

The problem with such visions is that they are fantasies involving a willful denial of all other aspects of Yalo's life, including the past embodied in the figure of his grandfather. A Syriac Christian priest who names himself Abuna Ephraim, Yalo's grandfather has surrendered in ecstasy to his ancient religion, turning his back on a contemporary world that seems bereft of ritual and faith. But it is an immersion that has obliterated everything else that shaped his identity: the name given to him in childhood by a Kurdish mullah who adopted him, the distant village of Ain Ward where he grew up, his mother, his first wife and his work as a layer of tiles on Beirut construction projects. Ephraim figures in all of Yalo's recollections of his family. He is a tragic and demented patriarch who perpetually seeks a meaning beyond everyday existence but also ends up distorting the daily lives of his daughter, Gabrielle, and his grandson, Yalo, forcing his obsessions with purity and faith upon them. Ephraim interferes in the relationship between Gabrielle and the tailor Elias, and when he legally adopts Yalo, he seems to be motivated at least partly by the desire to keep the father (who could be Elias or another man) out of the picture. Even after his death, Ephraim seems to hover constantly around Yalo, in the excursions with Shirin as well as during the later torture sessions in the prison cell, where the policemen's demands for a confession from the adult Yalo echo the grandfather's insistence on confessions from the child.

The idea of literature as confession, testimony and witness has quickened Khoury's writing for a long time, gathering impetus from the state of ruin in Lebanon. Born in Beirut in 1948, Khoury experienced the ruin firsthand. An early solidarity with the Palestinian cause led to membership in Fatah and work at a Palestinian journal edited by Mahmoud Darwish. After finishing a doctorate at the Sorbonne about the sectarian strife in Lebanon that culminated in the 1860 civil war, Khoury returned to his country in 1973 only to see it plunge into another civil war. Khoury joined the left-wing, largely Muslim forces, an unusual choice on the face of it. He is Christian, and if he had clung to the obvious sectarian alignments, he would have fallen in with the right-wing Christian militias that, backed by the Israelis, carried out brutal massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in 1982. Instead, Khoury committed himself to what he con-

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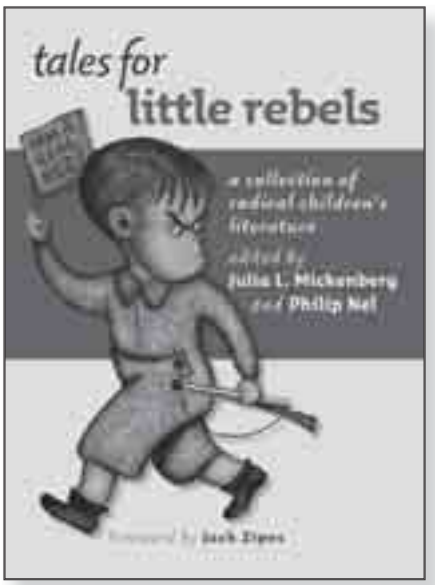
sidered the underprivileged, progressive force, which in practical terms meant abandoning his family home in the Christian neighborhood of Ashrafiyyeh.

The street warfare Khoury experienced during those years permeates his slim novel *Little Mountain*, published in 1977 and first translated into English in 1989. The novel's title refers to the neighborhood where as a young man he suddenly became one of the enemy. The attempt of Palestinian militants to take Beirut block by block, fighting for every street and building, appears analogous to Khoury's novelistic approach, which lurches from part to part, occasionally winning a skirmish but never providing a sense of a larger picture or a final outcome. While Khoury offers us stories of a frustrated civil servant in Beirut, a Lebanese man adrift in Paris after the war and a couple on a beach, he makes the heart of the novel the first-person narration of a guerrilla fighter caught in the civil war. In many ways, *Little Mountain* resembles the rapid montage of Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* stories, with hallucinatory scenes of ruined churches and sniper fire woven in with slower, meditative sections about life outside the war.

In subsequent works, too, Khoury has used the novel as a means of both engagement and withdrawal. It looks outward, attempting to grapple with the larger conditions within which it exists, yet it retreats indoors quite as often, trying to create a safe haven for individual and community memories. This approach is most successful in *Gate of the Sun*. Published in 1998 and translated into English in 2006, the novel is a lyrical and haunting meditation on Palestinian history from the *Nakba* of 1948 to the early '90s, depicting the life of a people from the time they fled their villages to the period when internecine warfare, Israeli aggression and Syrian scheming destroyed hopes of a resurgence of spirit among the refugees.

The novel is set in a hospital room in the Shatila refugee camp, where Khalil Ayyoub, a Palestinian partially qualified as a doctor, sits in vigil over the comatose body of Yunes al-Asadi, an elderly Palestinian fighter. The narrative takes the form of a monologue by Khalil, within which he weaves many stories and voices, ranging out to the camps and villages of Palestine and focusing especially on a cave called Bab al-Shams (the Gate of the Sun of the title). The approach showcases Khoury's method of choosing a few resonant settings (hospital room, cave and camp in this novel; the forest, the Paris Métro and the police station in *Yalo*) that are almost like stage sets in a play, places where conversation and memory are the means for comprehend-



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ing the flux of nation, city and history.

Khalil is a child of the Lebanon camps, his life running parallel to the long, ongoing exile of the Palestinians. Yunes, on the other hand, is a survivor of the *Nakba*, legendary because of his military exploits and his regular incursions into occupied territory to see his wife, Nahilah, who stayed behind in their village. Yunes and Nahilah meet in the secret cave Bab al-Shams, a country of their own set up in defiance of the modern states of the region. At the end, after Nahilah's death, when her son Salem seals the cave in accordance with her wishes, it is as if a country built out of imagination and love has died under an onslaught of razor-wire fences, sandbagged checkpoints and identity cards.

Khalil and Yunes, his silent listener, are said to have been close, almost like father and son, yet they are contrasting figures. Yunes is the strong and earthy peasant fighter, defying the Israelis as much out of love for his wife as for the sake of his homeland, while Khalil is an intellectual, afraid of violence and death, humiliated in his dealings with the Palestinian resistance and unwilling to say much about the killing of his lover, Shams. There's something schematic in this characterization, yet Khoury complicates any nostalgia we might have for the seemingly authentic Yunes. Yunes is pragmatic, brave and loving, but he is also shown to have been strangely oblivious to the needs of his wife, who reveals at the end that she had to depend on money from young men in the village for subsistence. As for Khalil's apparent cowardice, this has to be measured against the violence rippling through the camps:

> Now I call Shams' killing a massacre rather than an execution, as I used to.... They tricked her, asking her to go to the Miyyeh wi-Miyyeh camp to be reconciled and to pay blood money, and they were waiting for her. A man with a machine gun came from each family; they hid themselves behind the mounds lining the highway, and when she arrived—you know what happened. There's no need to describe the shreds of woman stuck to the metal of the burned-out car.

Against this background of death, Khalil's decision to nurture Yunes and tell him stories becomes both an affirmation of life and a deflation of militant masculinity. After all, the women in this novel are the most appealing and interesting figures—Nahilah, Shams and Umm Hassan, a midwife who is of Yunes's generation—and Khalil is especially sympathetic to them. Since the novel opens with Umm Hassan's death, Khalil's decision to follow her advice by sitting in vigil over Yunes and telling stories is an affirmation of this tender feminine wisdom, much needed amid all the violence.

As Khalil tells his stories to Yunes, presenting different versions and interpretations, his voice becomes increasingly attractive, offering touches of melancholy and comedy that balance the harsh content of his tales. He offers an account of the death of Yunes's son Ibrahim, leading us through a looping narrative full of symbols, foreboding and dreams, with Nahilah presenting two versions of her son's death to Yunes. In her second, apparently more truthful version, she says Ibrahim was injured while playing with Jewish children at a new settlement near their village. It may have been an accident or a deliberate injury—there is no way to know—but what is certain is that the Israelis refused her a permit to take the boy to a hospital. Yunes, on hearing this, makes elaborate preparations to attack the settlement. Yet he changes his mind when he is about to act, concerned about the reprisals that will fall upon the Palestinian villagers. Khalil, however, thinks Yunes grew afraid and his excuse was a way of making fear seem like tactical wisdom. "Have you noticed how things have changed?" Khalil asks. "Those days were heroic days, these are not. Yunes got scared, so he became a hero; I'm scared, so I've become a coward."

"Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero," a character cries out in despair in Brecht's play *Life of Galileo*. Khalil would like the answer Galileo gives: "Unhappy is the land that needs a hero." In *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury's achievement is to show the tumult from which the need for "heroic days" arises while being quite clear that such a need brings with it other limitations, including a tendency toward violence that is often directed inward.

In that sense, *Yalo* is a shrunken version of the earlier work, even as it takes up similar concerns. For the Christian Lebanese militants who are Yalo's companions, and even for Yalo, heroism doesn't amount to much more than discovering how much pain can be inflicted on another human being. They possess none of Yunes's sense of rootedness to land and family (a rootedness that survives displacement); they are dogs of war intent on the destruction of others and on their own survival.

This is what makes *Yalo* a lesser work than *Gate of the Sun*. It is powerful in its own way but distilled far too much into an essence of violence, whether that of the Lebanese state or of Yalo. There seems to be no person in the novel not touched by violence (unlike Khalil and the women characters in *Gate of the Sun*), and although this may well have been Khoury's intention, one wonders if this may not have become a trap for him. Khoury's characteristic approach of shifting perspectives and fragmented stories also seems to have become limiting. In a foreword to the English edition of *Little Mountain*, Edward Said pointed out that Khoury's style is almost deliberately unlike the monumental Arabic novel exemplified by the work of Naguib Mahfouz. Said noted that this was in many ways a reflection of the very different societies Mahfouz and Khoury were writing about, the former representing a Cairo that has existed through millenniums while the latter was depicting a Beirut always forced to question its existence. In *Yalo*, though, Khoury's usual narrative method comes too close to the worldview of the characters, from Yalo's plea that his story cannot be told straight to Ephraim's belief that books are windows opening onto the infinite, through which "we see fragments, as if we are peeking." This may be why there are moments in *Yalo* when a reader wants fullness, where the very glimpses Khoury offers create a need for a longer, steadier gaze. It seems unfair to demand of Khoury a shift from the aesthetic that has served him so effectively, but Khoury has taught us about the need to overturn entrenched views, even when they are our own. Having presented Beirut to us as broken and splintered, Khoury may need to show it to us again, this time in full. ■

Texas

A star is just a smudge
on magnified glass.
I have never been
more disappointed.
Nietzsche takes a saunter
along the border
because it is warm enough
to step out at night.
Malevolent blobs
dance at his feet.
This is when we pause to speak
in sleep. Our eyes
follow the lights while we ponder
which is worse:
Nothing or something
you don't recognize.

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Visitors consider Maurizio Cattelan's *Novecento* at the Biennale of Sydney in Australia, June 17, 2008.

Agony and Ecstasy

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

In recent decades the philosophy of art has been much preoccupied with the enigma of why a given object does or doesn't count as a work of art. Since the challenge of Duchamp's *Fountain* and other readymades, according to the Belgian writer Thierry de Duve, the form of aesthetic judgment has undergone a shift: from "this is beautiful" to, simply, "this is art." For the philosopher, art status is like a light switch, either on or off. But the everyday art world is nothing like that, which is why the sociologist Howard Becker complains that the philosopher's art world "does not have much meat on its bones." For Becker, as for artists, collectors and critics, whether something is a work of art or not is the least of it. In the sociologist's art world, hierarchies, rankings and orders of distinction proliferate. Status and reputation are all, and questions about them abound. Why does the seemingly kitschy work of Jeff Koons hang in great museums around the world while the equally cheesy paintings of Thomas Kinkade would never be considered? Why is Gavin Brown's Enterprise a venue for art but not the outdoor painting show at Washington Square? Why can the works of some artists fetch millions at auction while those of others with good reputations and long exhibition histories can be sold for thousands but possibly never resold? How do conflicting views on the value of different kinds of artworks jell into a rough and shifting consensus about the boundaries of what will be considered art in the first place?

Art Worlds
By Howard S. Becker.
California. 408 pp. $22.95.

Seven Days in the Art World
By Sarah Thornton.
Norton. 274 pp. $24.95.

The same kinds of question could be asked in other fields, but in the art of the past hundred years or so such questions have been of the essence: art is the field that exists in order for there to be contention about what art is. And such questions are not just for the cognoscenti; they've caught the fancy of a broad public as well. Once the man in the street saw a Picasso painting and said, "My kid could do better." Today, that child has grown up and is bemused but no longer outraged to read that a shark in a fish tank is worth a fortune but has been generously loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Now he admires, at least grudgingly, the clever scamp who could orchestrate that, and finds the whole affair rather interesting to talk about—even if the object itself might not, he suspects, be much to look at.

Sarah Thornton has spent her seven days in the art world of the reigning consensus, the one in which the Koonses thrive but not the Kinkades—an art world that claims the right to call itself *the* art world. Thornton attempts neither to refute nor support this will to monopolize the power to define art; she accepts it at face value. Becker once divided art practitioners into four rough categories: integrated professionals, mavericks, folk artists, and naïve artists. Only the professionals turn up in Thornton's book, and even then most are disqualified: a professional supplier of landscapes for hotel rooms has no more place here than the most eccentric hobbyist. Thornton's *Seven Days in the Art World* is a book I'd recommend to anyone who wants to know what the exclusive professional art world is like. For anyone who wants to understand why it's that way, and who requires more history and more comparative context than Thornton provides, the best choice is Becker's classic sociological study *Art Worlds*, which has recently been reissued in an updated and expanded twenty-fifth anniversary edition. It's as timely as

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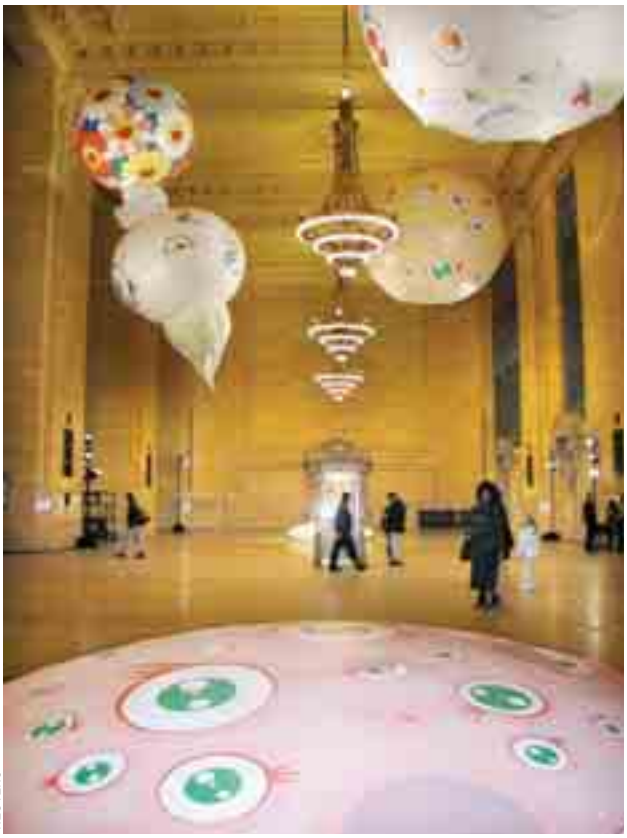
ever, and Becker knowledgeably draws his examples from the very different "art worlds" inhabited by jazz musicians, theater people and poets as well as the one surrounding painters and sculptors. Bernini's relations with Pope Urban VIII are as relevant to Becker's view of art as a form of collective action as E.E. Cummings's difficulties with typesetters.

Each of Thornton's seven "days" is an immersion in a typical setting for art world activity: an auction, an art school crit, a fair, the buildup to the Turner Prize, the offices of an art magazine, an artist's studio (that of the Japanese Pop artist Takashi Murakami) and the Venice Biennale. It's strange that one of the days was not spent at a museum, surely the ultimate destination for every professional contemporary artist. Perhaps this reflects the fact that, despite Thornton's warning that "the art *world* is much broader than the art *market*," her view of the art world reflects the centrality of the market over the past decade. In any case, the "you are there" immediacy she cultivates—underlined by section headings within each chapter that track the time of day as it passes—is a convenient fiction; more to the point are the five years that Thornton, a London-based Canadian writer, spent researching the book and interviewing a wide range of art world participants. (To prove how deeply she's dug, even my name is among the hundreds listed in her acknowledgments.) Thornton is not your typical journalist but rather a sociologist whose previous book is a quasi-ethnographic study of British rave and club culture in the early '90s. She is an experienced hand at using participant observation to tease out the tacit system of accords and conflicts that make up a community and the fine hierarchical distinctions that structure it. In writing *Seven Days*, Thornton has striven perhaps too avidly for an open, popular tone unencumbered by any overt theorization, indulging in too much description of people's outfits. Yet her academic training stands her in good stead as she attempts to map the "loose network of overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art."



REUTERS

Takashi Murakami's *Wink* at Grand Central Terminal, New York City, April 4, 2001

Thornton's reference to the art world as a subculture ought to be surprising. A visit to one of the great museums of modern and contemporary art that exist in every important city might easily convince the observer that art is just plain culture, not a subculture—that is, something central and dominant in society. After all, so much money and civic pride have been invested in it. But the people who make up the art world often wonder if their culture is really central at all. Undoubtedly they believe that it ought to be, but they are deeply aware that there is something eccentric about their relation to the culture at large, something fragile. Like the club culture that Thornton previously studied, the art world is a specialized milieu based on taste; both depend on the value of authenticity and a disdain for the aesthetics of mainstream mass culture. (A collector who loves Roy Lichtenstein will not therefore become an aficionado of comic books.) The publisher of *Artforum* reluctantly admits that his magazine "is establishment in a funny sense"; likewise, contemporary art is a culture but in a funny sense. The art world doesn't know whether it is a subculture pretending to be a culture or a culture pretending to be a subculture.

Thornton doesn't know either, and as for the art world denizens' proud but uneasy belief that they are somehow different from other people, she can only agree. "Even in the straightest part of the art world," she finds, "the players have character"—echoing the art magazine publisher who explains his love of the art world by describing it as "the place where I found the most kindred spirits—enough oddball, overeducated, anachronistic, anarchic people to make me happy." But they don't know whether their passion is noble or base; one collector speaks about it as a religion and an addiction. A gallerist nicely sums up his profession this way: "Our business is to sell symptoms articulated as objects." What's ambiguous is whether the symptoms are merely those of a few odd individuals or of the culture at large. The artists believe in their vision—"a total vision of how things have to be," as one puts it; "an individual's radically idiosyncratic interpretation of the world," says another—and in order for the artists to be successful, dealers and collectors and critics have to believe in it with them. "What we're looking for is integrity," say the collectors. Obsessiveness becomes a badge of honor: "Takashi worked so hard on this painting that several staff quit," a dealer enthuses over a work he's selling, neatly eliding the labor of Murakami's assistants with that of their boss. But at the same time, they believe, "a collection is a personal vision" too—it embodies the collectors' unique and idiosyncratic view of things (which, like the artists, they would nonetheless want to see collectively acknowledged).

Just as the value of an artwork is always in contention, especially when it hasn't been hallowed by time (that is, by habit), so the people who populate the art world can rarely feel secure about their position in it. "'Collector' should be an earned category," says one; there is an implicit distinction between the "real" collectors, who buy for the "right" reasons, and those who just shop for art—but this means the collector's money offers little protection from the sense of being under judgment by dealers (at least those the collector respects as the "right" dealers), artists and above all fellow collectors (the real ones, of course). Likewise, the artists are constantly falling prey to worries about how they are seen by dealers, critics and other artists. Success can be a sign that one has become boring and uncreative. And of course, while Thornton depicts artists, critics, curators, dealers, auction-house experts and collectors as all part of one big art world, they don't always mutually recognize one another as such, as when an artist casually speaks of "noncolleagues like collectors and museum people."

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On the other hand, the person pointing out faces in the crowd at the Venice Biennale and saying, "He's C list. She's B list" would probably not even put most artists, let alone a critic, on any list.

One unusual aspect of the art world—at least among the people who buy art rather than make it—goes unmentioned by Thornton, although a number of her interlocutors subtly allude to it: the fact that, at least in the United States and England, art's collectorship is heavily Jewish, and perhaps to a lesser extent, so is its "administration." Consider that in London, the unprecedented intensity of interest in contemporary art might never have happened were it not for the efforts of two men, both Jewish: the Iraqi-born collector Charles Saatchi and Nicholas Serota, the director of the Tate Gallery. One collector compares an evening sale at Christie's to "going to synagogue on the High Holidays. Everybody knows everybody else, but they only see each other three times a year, so they are chatting and catching up." A Turner Prize judge compares art to the Talmud: "an ongoing, open-ended dialogue that allows multiple points of view." Thornton observes the director of Art Basel, the world's most important contemporary art fair, making his round of the stands: he shmoozes his clients, the dealers, in French, Italian and German, and, Thornton observes, "I believe I even heard him say 'Shalom.'"

The implicitly Jewish ethos surely feeds into the feeling that the art world is somehow set apart, part of the establishment perhaps but only "in a funny sense." It also helps explain why the aesthetic of the art world is really an ethic, one that seeks something higher than mere pleasure. One of the deepest observations in *Seven Days* comes not from any of the renowned artists or brooding academics Thornton has spoken to but from the collector who, when asked if he likes work by young artists, says, "I don't necessarily like it, but I buy it." It's a joke, but it's serious, and from the viewpoint of collecting it represents an advanced stage of consciousness—just as it does when an artist makes something that he doesn't necessarily like. This was already the case at the beginning of the last century, for instance in 1905 when Gertrude and Leo Stein bought Matisse's *The Woman With the Hat*, now one of the treasures of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The "nastiest smear of paint I had ever seen," Leo called it. "I would have snatched it at once if I had not needed a few days to get over the unpleasantness." But of course there's a proviso: buying something before you've learned to like it, or making something that you haven't yet learned to like, is not the same as buying something because someone else likes it or making the art that someone else would like you to make—though that is precisely what innumerable collectors and artists do. To detach oneself from the vagaries of the taste of one's milieu is a considerable accomplishment. But to detach oneself from one's own taste is much rarer. To know one's taste and follow it represents integrity, but to know the limitations of one's taste and aspire to circumvent it is a more refined form of integrity as well as of business acumen. A painter explains of her work, "I know it's finished when the work feels independent of me." A sculptor says, "I don't necessarily love the things that I'm making.... It's about allowing yourself to accept what you do."

At a time when art still makes headlines mostly for the absurd prices people are willing to pay for it, it may sound surprising to say that the ethic of the art world entails a deep ambivalence about its financial basis—the "umbilical cord of gold" that, as Clement Greenberg once observed, has always tied it to the ruling class. Although the art world is filled with people who possess an incredible talent for moneymaking, my observation is that for most of them—dealers and collectors included—there is little economic rationality to their behavior, or anyway what economic rationality is there is a facade for more obscure motives. This is not to say that those motives are somehow "pure" but rather that even art that seems totally fixated on commercial culture is fixated on it in the mode of fantasy, of image.

Thornton refers to her seven chapters as narratives, but most of them are more like collages of snapshots. Only one chapter yields a conventional narrative arc with aspiration, obstacles, suspense and final success—and it turns out to be the book's high point. This is the chapter on Murakami, whom we see struggling to realize the biggest work of his career in time for a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The chapter is also an illustration of the strange relation between art and money. Murakami's "studio" is essentially a complex business with centers in Tokyo and New York City and a staff of ninety people. But as his dealer admits after the visit, the studio "sends a message. It says, 'We're not some messy workshop. We're a clean, pristine, professional business.'" After which he has to add, "Of course, the organization is totally dysfunctional." To Andy Warhol's dictum "Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.... Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art," Murakami's laughing response is, "That is a fantasy!"

And he's right. It's the last romance, the romance of the mundane. "I threw out my general life," Murakami tells Thornton, "so that I can make a concentration out of my job. You maybe expecting more romantic story?" One can only hope she responded, What could be more romantic than that? A prominent art theorist recently wrote, "The claim of a single artist that his or her work is an unpredictable, creative act, seems obsolete, and is not taken seriously by today's art world." What Thornton's field work shows is that the art world takes this idea very seriously indeed. At the climax of the chapter on Murakami, his giant sculpture of the Buddha, whose construction has caused enormous technical and logistical difficulties, emerges from the foundry. Only now does it become clear that the sculpture is Murakami's self-portrait. "Unfuckingbelievable!" exclaims the curator, who has been waiting for this moment of success or failure. He's been rewarded with the most romantic art experience of all, the pure myth itself, and still incredibly powerful: the revelation of creative selfhood through the manipulation of impersonal materials. It's straight out of *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, and we still love it. ■

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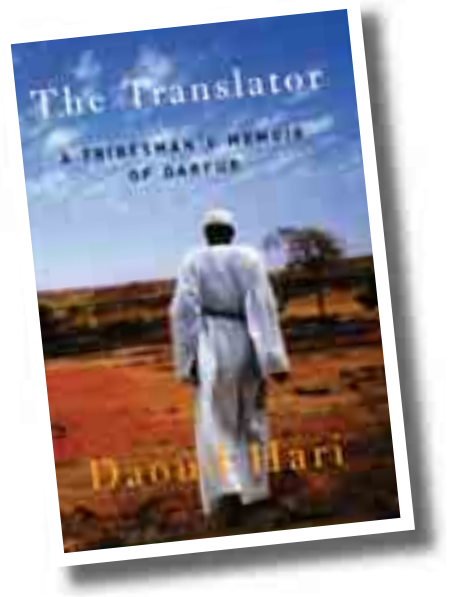

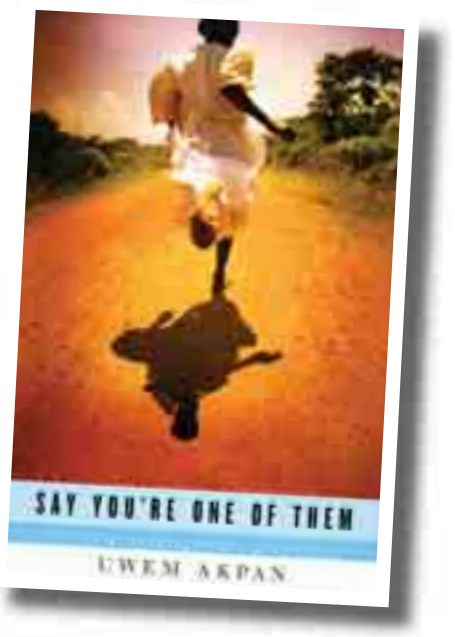

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Out of Africa

by FATIN ABBAS

In his eloquent diatribe "How to Write About Africa," published several years ago in *Granta*, the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina offers the following advice: "Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these." He continues, "In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country.... Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book." Wainaina's sarcastic suggestions point to a truth about writing on Africa: more often than not, it depicts the continent as nothing but a modern-day heart of darkness, where poverty, violence and disease overshadow the rest of human life and experience.

Of course, if writing about Africa seems preoccupied with poverty and violence, there is good reason for that: poverty and violence afflict the lives of millions of Africans. But Wainaina's point—that writing about Africa deals with the continent as if poverty and violence were the only things to be found there—is a salient one. "Taboo subjects," he reminds us, are not lurid acts but quotidian ones: "ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation."

Wainaina lambastes Western writing about Africa, but as the literature of Africa is increasingly penned by Africans, it is worth considering how his criticisms might apply to native depictions of the "dark continent." In two such books—*Say You're One of Them*, by Uwem Akpan, and *The Translator*, by Daoud Hari—there is no shortage of poverty and violence. Akpan's collection of short stories revolves around the lives of children facing situations of extreme hardship in countries like Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia. Hari's book, a memoir, chronicles his work as a guide and translator for Western journalists and aid workers in Darfur from 2003 until Hari was granted asylum by the United States in 2007. Both books are first efforts from native writers who are making their debut at a time when the market is hungry for "authentic" indigenous voices (Akpan is Nigerian, and Hari is a member of the Zaghawa ethnic group, one of the tribes under attack by the Sudanese government). But though it is a welcome change finally to read African writers on African life, these

Fatin Abbas, a doctoral student at Harvard University, writes on African literature and African affairs.

The Translator
A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur.
by Daoud Hari.
Random House. 204 pp. $23.

Say You're One of Them
By Uwem Akpan.
Little, Brown. 358 pp. $23.99.

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books also share many of the flaws of their Western predecessors, betraying elements of the safari reportage that Wainaina justly criticizes.

Darfur has become a Western cause célèbre, and the fundamental facts of the conflict there—that the Sudanese government and its Janjaweed militias have undertaken the cleansing of various ethnic groups, and that this process has so far led to the deaths of at least 200,000 people and the displacement of 2.5 million more—are widely known. Hari's account is the most recent in a wave of books and movies, several of them produced or promoted by such celebrity-cum-activists as Brad Pitt and Mia Farrow, that document atrocities in Sudan from the perspective of their victims. In *The Translator*, Hari recalls the chaos and destruction unleashed by the first government-sponsored Janjaweed attack on his village, which left many injured and dead, including a beloved older brother. Hari describes working as a scout in the early days of the conflict, when he often shuttled the homeless and wounded across the border to refugee camps in Chad, and discusses the many perils he confronted during his travels; these include his capture and torture by government security police while on assignment with Paul Salopek for *National Geographic* and, while assisting a British filmmaker, a near-death experience at the hands of rebels who mistook him for a spy.

Despite the perils Hari faced as a guide, the contacts he developed with Western NGO workers and globe-trotting journalists—like columnist Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* and Salopek, a Pulitzer Prize–winning foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*—helped save his life on more than one occasion, most notably when Salopek refused to leave him imprisoned by the government and facing execution after the journalist's release was negotiated by New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. Such contacts were also instrumental in the publication of *The Translator*. The book was written "with" Dennis Michael Burke and Megan McKenna—the former a professional writer and the latter an American NGO worker Hari met in Chad—over the course of several days of tape-recorded interviews on the couch of Hari's literary agent, Gail Ross.

Is it any surprise, then, that in his book, the identity of Darfurians remains static, that victimized Africans are persecuted by bloodthirsty Arabs? Hari maintains this rigid separation between what he calls the "non-Arab Africans" of Darfur and its "Arab nomads" by insinuating that the history of the region is one of nomadic Arab attacks against "indigenous Africans," as when he describes one of his aunts as "a famous warrior who dressed like a man [to fight] camel thieves and Arab armies." Hari's acknowledgment of a more complex relationship is limited to concessions that many of Darfur's Arab tribes were on friendly terms with their African counterparts and that as a young boy, "Arabs lived near us and were a part of my childhood as friends." For the most part, however, Hari portrays a strict Arab-African split.

Such simplifications gloss over the ambiguities that are integral to Darfurian identity. As Harvard University scholar Alex de Waal suggests in his essay "Who are the Darfurians?" the boundaries between the region's "Arabs" and "Africans" have always been fluid. It is well known that in Darfur, the term "Arab" does not refer to a discernible skin color or race—both Arabs and Africans in Darfur are black—but to an Arabic-speaking nomad or pastoralist; the so-called "African" groups consist of sedentary farming tribes. Historically, entire clans have been known to change their identity—"African" farmers became "Arabs" once they took up nomadism and adopted the Arabic language, while "Arabs" have adopted the identities of "African" ethnic groups that were politically powerful. There is a long tradition of intermarriage among tribes, and, living far from the center of power, they share a history of disenfranchisement by successive authoritarian regimes in the capital, Khartoum.

Ultimately, Hari's depiction of a rigid Arab-African dichotomy reflects the ways violence in Darfur has hardened tribal identities; the book would have benefited from a deeper exploration of aspects of the conflict that do not fit this mold. Hari fails to mention, for instance, that many Arabs in the region, like the Rizeigat tribe of southern Darfur, have resisted pressure from the government to take up arms, or that African rebels fighting on behalf of oppressed Darfurians have themselves been implicated in numerous human rights abuses.

Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* tries to treat the lives of Africans with a complexity that is truer to their experiences than Hari's simplistic narrative of good and evil. The stories compose a fictionalized survey of Africa's humanitarian crises: they range from the tale of a family broken up by poverty in Nairobi, to a story about child slavery in Gabon, to one about religious violence in Ethiopia, to another about religious violence in Ni-

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geria, to another that takes place during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This is a veritable laundry list of atrocities, but in setting his stories in numerous countries peopled with a multiplicity of cultures, Akpan has tried to show the variety with which these universal themes can play out in specific and discrete circumstances. Akpan's goal is laudable, but the results are often disappointing. He seems to be under the spell of a pan-Africanist literary sentiment that glosses over the particularities of each African culture and context. Akpan makes little more than token gestures to distinguish one place from the next, interspersing his characters' speech with French words when dealing with Francophone Africa, for example, or deploying other conspicuous locators ("their heels kicked up puffs of Ethiopian dust") to orient the reader geographically. References to the "Nairobi suburbs" and "Masai Mara Game Reserve" do little to compensate for the lack of specific, rooted detail without which the taste and texture of these places is lost.

Uwem Akpan glosses over the particularities of each African culture and context.

What's more, while Akpan tries to elucidate the ambiguities that lie at the heart of ethnic and religious identity in Africa, his manner is often banal and didactic. Commenting on Jubril, the protagonist of a story called "Luxurious Hearses," the narrator describes his native Nigeria in prose that sounds as if it were lifted from the opening pages of a UN report or Lonely Planet travel guide: "Like his multireligious, multiethnic country, Jubril's life story was more complicated than what one tribe or religion could claim." Born to a Christian father and a Muslim mother, Jubril is raised a Muslim in his mother's hometown and grows up to become a fundamentalist zealot. When, during a wave of murderous attacks on Christians, his friends accuse him of harboring secret Christian sympathies, he begins to question the fundamentalism he had embraced with such fervor. Again, Akpan falls into lecture mode in his depiction of the impact of these incidents on Jubril. "The events of the previous two days had knifed through his Muslim identity," the narrator recites. "Before now he would have hunted down the [Christian] infidels himself, but the betrayal by Musa and Lukman had changed him and his outlook." Rather than dramatize how Jubril's outlook has changed, Akpan waxes general about his chosen themes: "He felt connected to his newfound universe of diverse and unknown pilgrims, the faceless Christians. The complexity of their survival pierced his soul with a stunning insight: every life counted in Allah's plan."

"My Parents' Bedroom" also grapples with issues of identity. The story revolves around a 9-year-old Rwandan narrator who finds herself caught in the middle of the genocide pitting her father's ethnic group, the Hutus, against her mother's, the Tutsis. The genocide plays out within her family as she watches her father turn on the woman he had loved for so long. But communicating that the Rwandan genocide was more complex than we might imagine because Hutus and Tutsis sometimes married one another feels labored, as do Akpan's often hackneyed sentences: "My mother is a very beautiful Tutsi woman," the narrator tells us. "She has high cheekbones, a narrow nose, a sweet mouth, slim fingers, big eyes, and a lean frame." Papa, on the other hand, "looks like most Hutus, very black. He has a round face, a wide nose, and brown eyes. His lips are as full as a banana." Sketching physical contrasts through cliché is hardly a novel or nuanced way to explore the disparities between peoples at war.

Yet the story is not without its poignant moments. As they await the arrival of Hutu *genocidaires*, the mother advises her two children to reject the offending half of their bloodline. "Say you're one of them," she implores, showing us the ways violence and conflict can lead to the radical polarization of identities that are otherwise deeply intertwined.

Western readers have embraced Hari's and Akpan's books on the basis of their emotional power, social significance and literary merit, sometimes, perplexingly, conflating all three. For *Say You're One of Them*, the question of literary merit is a valid one. A Jesuit priest by vocation, Akpan was accepted into the University of Michigan's prestigious graduate program in creative writing despite administrators' sense that his talent was "a little raw," and he became a sensation after *The New Yorker* published "An Ex-mas Feast" in its 2005 debut fiction issue. Since then, he has a acquired a legion of fans: the distinguished blurbers of *Say You're One of Them* include Louise Erdrich and Mary Karr, and as of this writing, the book ranks third in sales for the "African" division of Amazon's World Literature category, below Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* but above *Cry, the Beloved Country* (an Oprah pick) and every book written by J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and Zakes Mda.

In Hari's case, the issue is not whether his book is a work of literary merit but whether that question is relevant in the first place. A *Washington Post* review favored *The Translator* over Elie Wiesel's *Night* (whose words, the reviewer felt, were "so searing as to be practically unbearable"), and the *New York Post* likened it to the diary of Anne Frank. This analogy isn't quite apt; Frank wrote her book in solitude, without an agent or handlers, aspiring to literary greatness and, despite her youth, approaching something like it. In filtering its faraway horror story through Western "co-authors," *The Translator* has more in common with *Zlata's Diary*, by Zlata Filipovic, an 11-year-old Sarajevan whose book was published at the height of the public's fascination with the Bosnian war. The memoir of the precocious prepubescent was also likened to Frank's, only to be disputed by David Rieff in *The New Republic*, who identified it as the enterprise of many well-meaning adult journalists, editors and publicists. The specter of "ghostwriting," which usually disqualifies a book from consideration as a literary work, seems to have been exorcised by a number of reviewers and their editors, who have high praise for Hari's "lucid prose," "quiet humor" and "pure, candid" voice. It is difficult to judge which are more incongruous: the reviews in which these accolades follow an "as told to" credit in the introductory material or the ones that fail to cite the "co-authors" at all. (To its credit, the *New York Times* is among the publications that opted not to review *The Translator*, either because of its multiple authors or the cameo appearance made by Kristof.)

In what appears to be a coincidence, the covers of Hari's and Akpan's books are strikingly similar. The photograph on the jacket of *Say You're One of Them* frames a child running, feet bare, dress flying, down a red dirt road, back to the viewer. Hari's cover depicts a tall man walking away from the camera into the scrubby African bush, head bent, his flowing jallabiya gown trailing behind him. In both photographs the subjects' faces remain hidden, despite the glaring sunlight, as they retreat into the distance. ■

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Puzzle No. 3146

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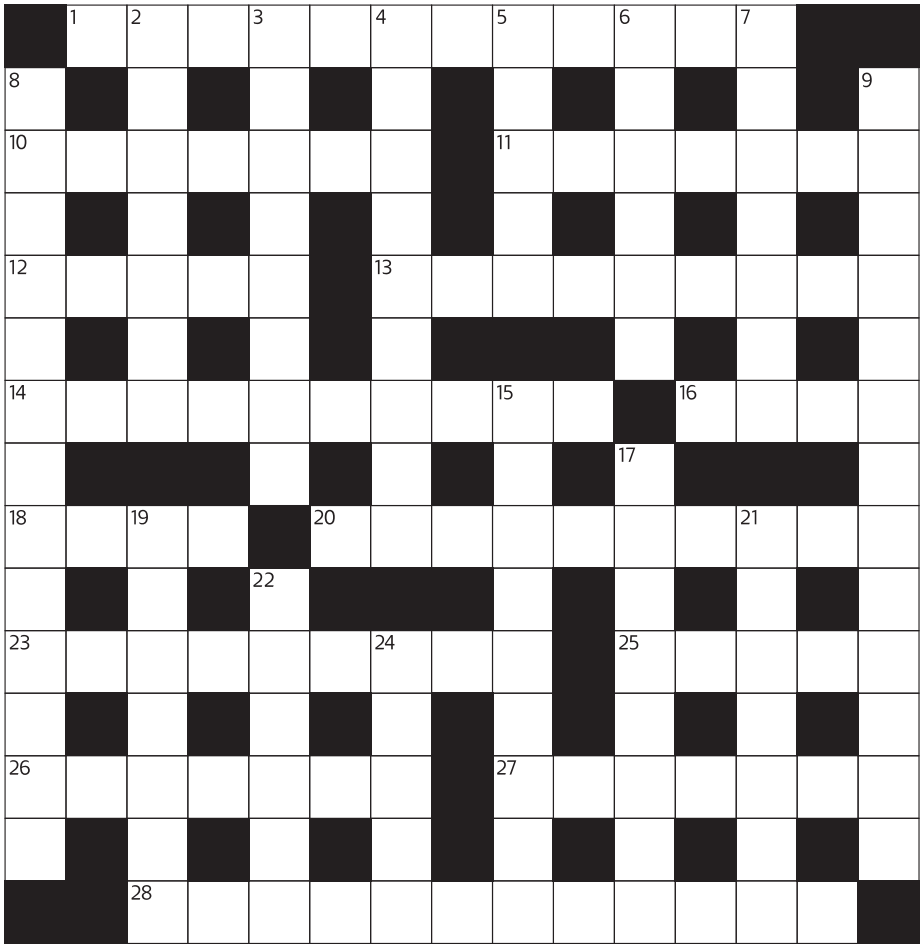

ACROSS

1 I sort of rent what is ready in Paris, and I have shortly come across a kind of dancing—which should be explanatory. (12)

10 More about what's happening—you get other than the same old sort of rise out of it. (7)

11 The sort of pudding found at a kind of dance, with ten going to a little state. (7)

12 The sort of feet that show I am here, to a degree. (5)

13 Did the earth move—or is it an overwhelming number of yes votes? (9)

14 Arthur was one of them, but the writer gets to go and go and go, to a point! (10)

16 People, as they say, have a number to fix up things with it. (4)

18 Sent by mistake to the home spot. (4)

20 Where some people keep their bloomers, like a river that gets to sort of stop this. (10)

23 Take little notice with the apparel ending up in two directions—the name on the envelope should show it. (9)

25 Untrue! (3,2)

26 Relating to the tongue, lisping at first in Gaul, possibly. (7)

27 In part, all is so mercenary—but flexible. (7)

28 One takes notes, but takes notes wrongly, with a chart that goes to the queen. (12)

DOWN

2 One might have the latest dope for you, going in all directions to some guy. (7)

3 It's the wrong year to have a young lady inside, though you might send one on an errand. (8)

4 What a golfer hopes to make with a thing to stand on, with Mr. Gore—but not admitted to practice. (9)

5 Taken in with a point having a possibly neat finish. (5)

6 One is three-quarters impostor, which may be duty. (6)

7 It only takes one bite to make such, but it might be rather rubbery, in a sense. (7)

8 Such things could be hard to do without. (13)

9 In turn, they might provide pretty colors. (13)

15 One of FDR's adherents could be asked for it, if people don't like their hands! (3-6)

17 Rears what one does to a subject at times. (6,2)

19 They might be on the house, but one so admits his guilt about part of the psyche. (7)

21 The possible result is not income, certainly. (7)

22 The ump might end up with someone from Salt Lake—to prove one is mistaken. (6)

24 Constructed from ovals, one takes more than a few shots with it. (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3145

		M	A	L	A	D	J	U	S	T	E	D		
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	U		A		T		L		E		A		N	
B	R	I	D	G	E		E	U	L	O	G	I	E	S
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Without slowing America's population growth, T. Boone's energy plan could be gone with the wind.

Americans agree that saving our environment depends on developing renewable energy sources. T. Boone Pickens, the legendary oil man, thinks energy from wind is part of the answer. We agree. But even the most brilliant energy plan will fail if we don't address our rapidly growing population. Simply stated, the larger our population, the more energy we consume. The more energy we need the more potential damage to the environment. It's a vicious cycle. Clearly, it is impossible to talk about environmental conservation without talking about population. And it is impossible to talk about population without talking about immigration. America's population is on a path to increase from 300 million to 400 million in just 30 years* if we do nothing. Most of that growth would be a result of immigration.** Historically our government has seen immigration policy as unrelated to energy and the environment. That needs to change now. It's time to consider how immigration influences total U.S. energy consumption and adjust immigration downward to levels that won't negate any progress we make on energy independence and environmental protection. If we don't, we're just blowing in the wind.

America's Leadership Team for Long Range Population-Immigration-Resource Planning

300 million people today, 400 million in just 30 years. Think about it.

American Immigration Control Foundation **www.aicfoundation.com**	Californians for Population Stabilization **www.capsweb.org**	Federation for American Immigration Reform **www.fairus.org**	NumbersUSA **www.numbersusa.org**	Social Contract Press **www.thesocialcontract.com**

*Based on U.S. Census Bureau projection, 2008
**Pew Hispanic Center

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